

THE  
**DYING THOUGHTS**  
OF  
**THE REV. RICHARD BAXTER**

(1615-1691)

UPON

**Philippians 1.23**

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ABRIDGED BY

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## PREFACE

### THE COMPILER OF THIS ABRIDGMENT.

In the following pages the reader will find none of the triumphs peculiar to martyrdom, nor any of those ecstasies which have distinguished some particular Christians on their dying beds. Some extraordinary cases excite our joyful surprise, rather than being patterns for our imitation.

The “Dying Thoughts” of Mr. Baxter chiefly present to our view what every Christian may attain, and what it is the highest interest as well as the indispensable duty of every Christian to aspire after. See here his doubts and fears in the prospect of eternity; though he had spent a long life in exemplary holiness, and in great nearness to God and heaven. See his jealousies over his own heart, and anxious concern to discover his sincerity; together with his sober appeals and earnest attention to every dictate of reason and Scripture, in order to establish his mind and conscience in a well-grounded peace.

See, also, his unwearied striving with God and his own soul to have his grace in vigorous exercise. All these are well-known ingredients of the Christian temper; and therefore they tend, not to perplex and discourage, but to counsel, strengthen, and comfort serious readers, while they discern, in one of Mr. Baxter’s exalted attainments, the same conflicts, complaints, and desires, which fill their own breasts.

It is observed of LORD WILLIAM RUSSELL, who died a martyr for the liberty of his country, that a little before his death, by a trusty messenger, he sent MR. BAXTER his hearty thanks for his *Dying Thoughts*, “which,” he says, “have made me better acquainted with the other world than I was before; and have contributed not a little to my support and relief, and to fitting me for what I am to go through.”

Though the *Dying Thoughts* were written about forty years after the *Saints’ Rest*, both are evidently built on the same principles, and are animated by the same spirit. And let it suffice to add that the abridgment of both is conducted in the same manner.

B. FAWCETT.

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Benjamin Fawcett (1715-1780) was an English dissenting minister and theologian. He was born in Sleaford, Lincolnshire, and educated at Philip Doddridge’s dissenting academy in Northampton. Fawcett served as a minister in Whitchurch and Chester before moving to Kidderminster, where he wrote “*A Compassionate address to Christian negroes in Virginia and other British colonies in North America.*”



## DYING THOUGHTS.

*For I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Phil. 1:23.*

### CHAPTER 1. WHAT IS DESIRABLE IN THE PRESENT LIFE.

The vanity of man as mortal. The author's design to speak only to himself; with a general plan of the work. The apostle's happiness whether in living or dying. The present life is desirable, 1. to please God; 2. to secure our own salvation; 3. to do good to others. Minding the life to come is not the whole of religion. The Old Testament saints duly regarded the present life. The author is thankful for present mercies to himself, his friends, and country; especially for his usefulness in the church. He desires to improve the remainder of life, and rejoices in his happy situation.

“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble; he comes forth like a flower, and is cut down; he flees like a shadow, and does not continue... And do You open Your eyes on such a one, and bring me into judgment with You?” *Job 14.1, 3* Like a watch when it is wound up, or a candle newly lighted, so man, newly conceived or born, begins a motion which incessantly hastens to its appointed period. And as an action, or the time of it, is nothing when it is past, so vain a thing would man be, and so vain is life, were it not for the hopes of a more durable life with which this is connected.

But those *hopes* and the *means* for supporting them not only distinguish a *believer* from an *infidel*, but a *man* from a *beast*. When Solomon describes the difference only in respect to time and the things of time, he well observes that *one event* happening to both, shows that both are *vanity*. And Paul says of Christians, “If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable.” *1Cor 15.19* Though even in *this life*, as related to a *better* one, and as we ourselves are exercised about things of a higher nature than the concerns of a temporal life, we are far happier than the men of the world.

I am intending to speak to none but myself, and therefore, supposing the meaning of the text to be duly ascertained, I will only observe what is useful to my own heart and practice. In this

FIRST CHAPTER I will consider, *What there is desirable in the present life*; then show,

SECOND CHAPTER, *The necessity and reasonableness of believing that pious separated spirits are with Christ*; next explain,

THIRD CHAPTER, *What it is to depart and to be with Christ*; and

FOURTH CHAPTER, *Why it is far better to be with Him*; I will conclude,

FIFTH CHAPTER, with expressing *My concern that I myself may be willing to depart and to be with Christ*.

It was a happy state into which grace had brought the apostle, who saw so much of what was not only tolerable, but greatly desirable, both in living and dying. “For him to live was Christ,” that is, to do the work and serve the interest of Christ; for him “to die was gain,” *Phi 1.21* that is, it would be to his own interest and reward. His strait was not whether it would be good to live, or good to depart, because both were good; but he doubted which of the two was more desirable. Nor was it his meaning to bring his own interest and Christ's into competition with each other. By Christ, or the interest of Christ, he means his serving the churches of Christ on earth. But he knew that Christ also had an interest in his saints above, and could raise up more to serve him here. Yet because he was to judge by what appeared, and he saw that such

were much wanted on earth, this turned the scales in his choice. And therefore, in order to serve Christ in the edification of his churches, he was more inclined, by denying himself, to have his reward delayed at this same time, well knowing that the delay of his reward would tend to its increase. Here let me observe, “That even in this world, short of death, there is some good that is so much to be regarded, that it may justly prevail with believers to prefer it before the present having of their reward.” I rather note this, so that no temptation may carry me into the extreme of taking nothing but heaven to be worth minding, and so cast off the world, even sinfully, on the pretence of mortification and a heavenly life. Not that anything on earth is better than heaven, or is in itself to be preferred before heaven. The end, as such, is better than the means, and perfection is better than imperfection. But the present use of the means may sometimes be preferred before the present possession of the end. And the use of the means for a higher end may be preferred before the present possession of a lower end. *Everything has its season.* Planting, sowing, and building are not so good as reaping, fruit-gathering, and dwelling; but they must be first done *in their season*.

But let me inquire, What is there so desirable in this present life? The answer is obvious, for:

1. While this present life continues, the will of God is fulfilled, who will have us on earth for a season; and *that is best which God wills*.

2. The life to come depends on this present life, as the life of adult age depends upon infancy, or the reward upon the work, or the prize of racers or soldiers upon their running or fighting, or the merchant’s gain upon his voyage. Heaven is won or lost on earth; the possession is *there*, but the preparation is *here*. Christ will judge all men in another state, as their works have been in this one. *First*, “Well done, good and faithful servant;” and *then*, “Enter into the joy of your Lord.” <sup>Mat 25.21</sup> “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course,” must go before the “crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give.” <sup>2Tim 4.7-8</sup> All that we ever do for salvation must be done here. It was on earth that Christ himself wrought the work of our redemption, fulfilled all righteousness, became our ransom, and paid the price of our salvation; and here also we must do our part. Bestowing the reward is God’s work, who we are sure will never fail. Here there is no room for the least suspicion of His failing in anything He undertakes; but the danger and fear is of our own miscarrying, lest we not be found capable of receiving what God will certainly give to all who are fit to receive it. *To distrust God is heinous sin and folly; but to distrust ourselves is highly reasonable.* So that if we would make sure of heaven, then it must be by “giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure” upon earth. <sup>2Pet 1.10</sup> If we fear hell, we must fear our being prepared for it. And it is great and difficult work that we have to do upon earth — for instance, to be cured of all damning sin; to be born again; to be pardoned and justified by faith; to be united to Christ, made wise unto salvation, renewed by his Spirit, and conformed to His likeness; to overcome all the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; to perform all our duties towards God and man — “with the heart to believe in Christ unto righteousness, and with the mouth to make confession unto salvation;” <sup>Rom 10.10</sup> to “suffer with Christ that we may reign with him, and be faithful unto death that we may receive the crown of life.” <sup>2Tim 2.12; Rev 2.10</sup> Thus, on earth we must “so run that we may obtain it.” <sup>1Cor 9.24</sup>

3. We must labor to *do good to many*, and therefore we have greater work to do on earth than merely securing our own salvation. We are entrusted with our Master’s talents for his service, to do our best in our places, to propagate His truth and grace, to edify his church, honor his cause, and promote the salvation of as many souls as we can. All this is to be done on earth, if we would secure the end of all in heaven.

It is then an error, though but few are guilty of it, to think that all religion lies in minding only the life to come, and in disregarding all things in this present life. All true Christians must seriously mind both the end and the means of attaining it. If they do not believingly mind the end, they will never be faithful in the use of the means; if they are not diligent in using the means, they will never obtain the end. Heaven must have our highest esteem, and our habitual love, desire, and joy; but earth must have more of our daily thoughts for present practice. A man who travels to the most desirable home, has a habitual desire for it all the way. But his present business is his *journey*; and therefore his horse, inns, and company, his roads and his fatigues, may employ more of his thoughts and talk and action than his home.

I have often wondered to find David in the Psalms, and other saints before the coming of Christ, express so great a sense of the things of this present life, and say so little of another life; taking so much account of prosperity, dominion, and victories on the one hand, and of persecution and the success of enemies on the other. But I consider that it was not for mere personal and carnal interests, but *for the church of God*, and for *His* honor, word, and worship. For they knew, if things go well with us on earth, they will be sure to go well in heaven; if the militant church prospers in holiness, there is no doubt that it will triumph in glory. Satan does much of his damning work by *men*, using them as his instruments; so that if we escape their temptations, we escape much of our danger. When idolaters prospered, Israel was tempted to idolatry. Most follow the powerful and prosperous side. And therefore, for the glory of God and for our own everlasting salvation, while on earth we must greatly regard our own welfare, and much more, the *church's*. Indeed, if earth is desired only for earth, and prosperity is loved only to gratify the flesh, it is the certain mark of damning carnality and an earthly mind. But to desire peace and prosperity for the sake of souls, the increase of the church, and the honor of God, so that "His name may be hallowed, his kingdom come, and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven," <sup>Mat: 6.9-10</sup> accords with the highest and most sacred discharge of duty.

And now, O my soul, do not be unthankful for the mercies of this present life. This body is so nearly united to you, that it must be either a great help, or a hinderance. Had it been more afflicted, it might have been a discouraging clog, like a tired horse on a journey, or a dull tool to a workman, or an untuned instrument in music. A sick or a bad servant in a house is a great trouble, and much more a bad wife; but your body is nearer to you than either of these could be, and will be more of your concern. Yet if it had been stronger and healthier, sense and appetite would have been strong; and the stronger your lusts, the greater would have been your danger, and much more difficult your victory and salvation. Even weak senses and temptations have too often prevailed. How do you know then what stronger ones might have done? When I see a thirsty man in a fever, or dropsy (edema), and especially when I see strong and healthful youth bred up in fulness and among temptations — how they are mad in sin, violently carried to it, bearing down the rebukes of God and conscience, parents and friends, and all regard to their own salvation — this tells me how great a mercy I had even in a body that is not liable to their case. Also, many a bodily deliverance has been of great use to my soul, renewing my time and opportunity and strength for service, and bringing frequent and fresh reports of the love of God. If bodily mercies were not of great use to the soul, Christ would not so much have showed his saving love as he did, by healing all manner of diseases. Nor would God promise us a *resurrection of the body*, if a suitable body did not promote the welfare of the soul.

I am obliged to great thankfulness to God for the mercies of this life which he has shown to my *friends*. That which promotes their joy should increase mine. I ought to 'rejoice with those

who rejoice.’ <sup>Rom 12.15</sup> Nature and grace teach us to be glad when our friends are well and prosper, though all this must be in order for better things than bodily welfare.

Nor must I undervalue those mercies of this life which belong to the *land of my nativity*. The lack of them is part of God’s threatened curse; and ‘godliness has a promise of the life that now is, and of that life which is to come, and so is profitable for all things.’ <sup>1Tim 4.8</sup> When God sends on a land the plagues of pestilence, war, persecution, and famine, especially *a famine of the word of God*, it is a great sin to be insensible of them. If anyone says, ‘While heaven is sure we have no cause to accuse God, or to cast away comfort, hope, or duty,’ they say it well. But if they say, ‘Because heaven is all, we must make light of all that befalls us on earth,’ they are amiss. Pious and public-spirited men, who promote the safety, peace, and true prosperity of the commonwealth, thereby very much befriend religion and men’s salvation, and are greatly to be loved and honored by all. Let me therefore be thankful for the preservation from enemies, the restraint of persecution, the concord of Christians, and the increase of godliness in this land, and especially that the gospel is continued in it.

Be particularly thankful, my soul, that God has made any use of you for the service of his church on earth. My God, my soul magnifies you for this, and my spirit rejoices in the review of your great undeserved mercy. O what am I, whom You took up from the dunghill, or low obscurity, that I should live in the constant relish of your sweet and sacred truth, and with such encouraging success, communicate it to others? Or that I may say, now that my public work seems ended, that these forty-three or forty-four years I have no reason to think that I ever labored in vain? With what gratitude I must look upon all places where I lived and labored—but above all, that place which had my strength.<sup>1</sup> I bless You for the great numbers of them gone to heaven, and for the continuance of piety, humility, concord, and peace among them. Also for all that by my *writings* have received any saving light and grace. O my God, do not let my own heart be barren while I labor in your husbandry to bring others unto holy fruit. Let me not be a stranger to the life and power of that saving truth which I have done so much to communicate to others. O do not let my own words and writings condemn me as void of that divine and heavenly nature and life which I have said so much of to the world.

Stir up then, my soul, your sincere desires, and all your faculties, to do the remnant of the work of Christ appointed you on earth, and then joyfully wait for the heavenly perfection in God’s own time. You can truly say, ‘To me to live is Christ.’ It is his work for which you live. You have no other business in the world. But you do this work with a mixture of many oversights and imperfections, and trouble your thoughts too much with distrust about God’s part, who never fails. If your work is done, be thankful for what is past, and that you have come so near the port of rest. If God will add any more to your days, serve him with double alacrity. The prize is almost within sight. Time is swift and short. You have told others that ‘there is no working in the grave,’ and that it must be ‘now or never.’ Do not dream, because Christ’s righteousness was perfect, that God will save the wicked, or equally reward the slothful and the diligent. As sin is its own punishment, holiness is much of its own reward. Whatever God appointed you *to do*, see that you *do it* sincerely, and *with all your might*. If sin disposed men to be angry because it is detected, disgraced, and resisted, so that God is pleased, then the wrath of those who will shortly be far angrier with themselves, should be patiently borne. I shall not be hurt when I am with Christ, by the calumnies of men on earth; but the saving benefit will be enjoyed everlastingly, by converted sinners. Words and actions are transient things, and once past, they are nothing; but their effect on an immortal soul may

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<sup>1</sup> Kidderminster.



be endless. All the sermons that I have preached are nothing now; but the grace of God on sanctified souls is the beginning of eternal life.

It is an unspeakable mercy to be thus employed sincerely and with success; and therefore I had reason all this while to be in Paul's strait, and make no haste in my 'desires to depart.' The crown will come in its due time, and eternity is long enough to enjoy it, however long it is delayed. But if I will do that which must obtain it for myself and others, it must be quickly done, before my declining sun is set. O that I had no worse causes of my unwillingness yet to die, than my desire to do the work of life for my own and other men's salvation, and to 'finish my course with joy, and the ministry I have received of the Lord!' <sup>Act 20.24</sup>

As on earth I must do good to others, so it must be in a manner suited to their earthly state. Here, souls are closely united to bodies by which they must receive much good or hurt. Do good to men's *bodies*, if you would do good to their *souls*. Do not say corporeal things are worthless trifles, for which the receivers will never be the better. They are things that nature is easily sensible of, and sense is the passage to the mind and will. Do you not find what a help it is to yourself, to at anytime have any ease and alacrity of body; and what a burden and hinderance pains and cares are? Labor then to free others from such burdens and temptations, and do not disregard them. If you must 'rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep,' <sup>Rom 12.15</sup> then promote your own joy by helping theirs, and avoid your *own* sorrows in preventing or curing *theirs*. But, alas, what power selfishness has in most of us! How easily we hear our brethren's pains and reproaches, wants and afflictions, in comparison with our own! How few thoughts, and how little cost and labor we use for their supply, in comparison with what we do for ourselves! *Nature* indeed teaches us to be sensible of our own case; but *grace* tells us that we should not make so great a difference as we do; but we should love our neighbor as ourselves.

And now, my soul, consider how mercifully God has dealt with you, that your strait should be between two such desirable conditions. I shall either die speedily, or stay yet longer upon earth. Whichever it is, it will be a merciful and comfortable state. That it is 'desirable to depart, and be with Christ,' I must not doubt; and I shall hereafter more copiously consider it. And if my abode on earth yet longer is so great a mercy as to be put into the balance against my present possession of heaven, surely it must be a state which obliges me to great thankfulness to God and comfortable acknowledgment. Nor should my pain, or sickness, or sufferings from men, make this life on earth unacceptable while God continues me in it. Paul had his thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, and he suffered more from men than I have done. And yet he 'gloried in his infirmities, and rejoiced in his tribulations,' <sup>2Cor 12.9; Rom 12.12</sup> and was 'in a strait between' living and dying — but choosing rather to live yet longer. Alas, the strait of most men is between the desire of life for fleshly interest, and the fear of death as ending their felicity; between a tiring world and body, which make them weary of living, and the dreadful prospect of future danger, which makes them afraid of dying. If they live, it is in misery; if they must die, they fear greater misery: whether they look behind or before them, to this world or the next, fear and trouble is their lot. Yes, many serious Christians, through the weakness of their trust in God, live in this perplexed strait, weary of living and afraid of dying, continually pressed between grief and fear.

But Paul's strait was *between two joys*, which of them he should desire most. And if that is my case, what should much interrupt my peace or pleasure? If I *live*, it is *for Christ*, for his service, and to prepare for my own and his everlasting felicity; and should any suffering make me impatient with such a work, and such a life? If I *die* soon, it is *my gain*; God, who appoints me my work, limits my time; and surely his glorious reward can never be unseasonable, or

## Chap. 1. What is Desirable in the Present Life

come too soon, if it is the time that *He* appoints. When I first engaged myself to preach the gospel, I reckoned it probable that it would be upon one or two years, and God has made it above forty-four. And what reason have I to be unwilling now, either to live or die? God's service has been so sweet to me that it has overcome the trouble of constant pains or weakness of the flesh, and all that men have said and done against me. How much the following exceeds this pleasure, I am not now able to conceive. There is some trouble in all this pleasant work, from which the soul and flesh would rest. And 'blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.' <sup>Rev 13.13</sup>

O my soul, what need has this kind of strait to trouble you? Leave God to his own work, and mind that which is yours. *So live* that you may say, 'Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' <sup>Gal 2.20</sup> Then, as you have lived in the comfort of hope, you shall die in the comfort of vision and enjoyment. And when you can say of God, 'Whose I am, and whom I serve,' <sup>Act 27.23</sup> you may boldly add, 'I know whom I have believed, and into His hands I commit my departing spirit.'

**CHAPTER 2.**  
**THE NECESSITY AND REASONABLENESS OF BELIEVING**  
**THAT PIOUS SEPARATED SPIRITS ARE WITH CHRIST.**

**I.** Such faith is necessary, 1. to ascertain the design of life; 2. to excite to holiness; 3. to make us know, value, and improve our mercies; 4. and to comfort us under sufferings. **II.** Such faith is reasonable, because, 1. the soul is immortal; 2. this immortality is the dictate of nature; 3. every man ought to seek happiness; 4. men and brutes differ in the knowledge of God and futurity; 5. God is a just governor; 6. and there is a gospel revelation: also because, 7. of God's regard to prayer; 8. the ministration of angels; 9. Satan's temptations; 10. and especially the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. The author inculcates these considerations upon himself, in order to strengthen his own faith.

The subject suggests to my thoughts the necessity of believing that the souls of the godly, when departed from here, shall be with Christ, and the reasonableness of such a faith. We are elsewhere assured that "we shall be with him, where he is;" <sup>1Joh 3:2</sup> and to be with him can be no less than a state of communion, and a participation of happiness. To believe such a state of happiness for departed pious souls must appear, upon consideration, to be both *necessary* and *reasonable*.

**I. The NECESSITY** of believing that pious separated spirits are with Christ, appears by considering that without this belief, we shall be uncertain concerning the design of life — we shall lose the most powerful motives to a holy life — we can neither know, estimate, nor improve our mercies, nor can we bear our sufferings with comfort.

1. We would be uncertain concerning the *design* of life. It is admitted that the right end of life is to *please God*. But I must desire to please God better than I do in this imperfect state; I must desire to please him *perfectly*. And our desires of our ultimate end must have no bounds. God has made the desire of our own happiness so necessary to the soul of man, that it cannot be separated from our desire to please Him. Therefore, both in respect to God and to our own happiness, we must believe that He is the everlasting "rewarder of those who diligently seek him." <sup>Heb 11.6</sup> If we did not know whether God will turn our pleasing him to our loss, or to our having no gain by pleasing him, this would hinder our love to him, and our trust and joy in him. And consequently, it would hinder the cheerfulness, sincerity, and constancy of our obedience. If we had no *certainty* what God will do with us, we must have some *probability* and *hope* before we can be entirely devoted to his service. How can a man pitch upon an *uncertain end*? If he wavers so as to have no *end*, then he can use no *means*; he lives not as a *man*, but as a *brute*. Or if he stakes himself upon a *wrong end*, he will but make work for repentance.

2. We would lose the most powerful *motives to a holy life*. Indeed, goodness is desirable for itself; but the goodness of the *means* is their fitness for the *end*. We have here abundance of hinderances, temptations, and difficulties, which must be overcome. Our natures are diseased, and greatly indisposed to the most necessary duties. Will they ever be discharged if the necessary motives are not believed? Our duties to God and man may cost us our estates, liberties, and lives. The world is not so happy as to commonly know good men from bad, or to encourage piety and virtue, or to forbear opposing them. And who will let go of his present welfare without some hope of better as a reward? Men do not usually "serve God for nothing," or while they think it will be their loss to serve him. A life of sin will not be avoided for inferior motives. When lust and appetite incline men strongly and constantly toward their respective objects, what will sufficiently restrain them, except motives from eternal things? If sin so overspread the earth, notwithstanding all the hopes and fears of a life to come, what good would it do if there were no such hopes and fears?

3. We can neither know, estimate, nor improve our *mercies*. God gives us all the mercies of this life as *helps* to an immortal state of glory, and as *earnests* of it. Sensualists do not know what a soul is, nor what soul-mercies are. And therefore they do not know the just value of all bodily mercies, but take up only with the *carcass, shell, or shadow*, instead of the *life* of their mercies. No wonder they are so unthankful for God's mercies, when they do not know the real excellence of them.

4. Nor can we bear our present *sufferings* with comfort, without the hope of living with Christ. What would support and comfort me under my bodily languishings and pains, my weary hours and daily experience of the *vanity and vexation* of all things under the sun, had I not a prospect of the comfortable end of all? I, who have lived in the midst of great and precious mercies, have all my life had something to do to overcome the temptation of wishing that I had never been born; and I would never have overcome it, but by the belief of a blessed life hereafter. We would be strongly tempted, in our considerate moments, to murmur at our Creator as dealing worse by us than by the brutes, if we must have all those cares, griefs, and fears caused by the knowledge of what we lack, and the prospect of death and future evils (which brutes are exempted from), and did not have the hope of future felicity to support us. Seneca had no better argument to silence such murmurers than to tell them, "If this life has more evil than good, and you think God does you wrong, then you may remedy yourselves by ending it when you will." But that could not cure the repinings of nature, when we weary of the miseries of life, and yet are afraid of dying. No wonder so many fancied that souls were punished in *these* bodies for something done in a *preexistent* state. "O how contemptible a thing is man," says Seneca, "unless he lifts himself up above human things." Therefore says Solomon, when he had tried all sensual enjoyments, "I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous to me; for all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Ecc 2.17

**II. As for the REASONABLENESS** of believing that pious separated spirits are with Christ, I have often thought whether an implicit belief of it may not be better than searching into its nature, and testing what can be said against it. I have known many godly women who never disputed the matter, but served God comfortably to a very old age, and who lived many years in such a cheerful readiness and desire for death as few studious men ever attain to. This no doubt was the *divine reward* for their unwavering confidence and trust in the promises through Christ. On the contrary, as doubts and difficulties are apt to present themselves to an inquisitive mind, they must be answered. For if we reject them unanswered, we give them half the victory over us. And a faith that is not upheld by such evidence of truth as reason can discern and justify, is often joined with much doubting. Men dare not confess this, but they do not therefore overcome it. And the weakness of such a faith may tend to enfeeble all the graces and duties which should be strengthened by it. Who knows how soon a temptation from Satan, or infidels, or from our own dark hearts, may assault us, which will not be overcome without clear evidence? Yet many who try and reason and dispute the most, do not have the stronger faith. Indeed, there is a wide difference between that light which reveals the thing itself, and a mere artificial kind of knowledge, to form arguments and answer objections. Unlearned persons who have little of the latter, may have more of the former, even that teaching from God which reaches the heart as well as the understanding. And who does not find it necessary to pray hard for this divine teaching? When I can prove the truth of the word of God and of the life to come, with the most convincing evidence of reason, I feel my need to cry daily to God to "increase my faith" and to give me that light which may sanctify the soul and reach the end. Nevertheless, this effectual teaching ordinarily supposes that which is artificial. Unlearned Christians are convinced by good evidence, that God's word is true and his rewards sure, even if they cannot state that evidence, or conceive of it without some

confusion. With respect to curious and needless inquiries beyond what is revealed, it is a believer's wisdom to implicitly trust his soul to Christ, and to fear that vain, vexatious knowledge which is selfish, and savors of a distrust of God, and is that sin, and *fruit* of sin, which the learned world too little fears. That "God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him," <sup>Heb 11.6</sup> and that holy souls shall be in blessedness with Christ, I am convinced of by the following concurrent evidences, on which my soul raises its hopes: the immortality of the soul; the belief of it naturally implanted in all men; the duty of all men to seek after future happiness; the difference between men and brutes, concerning the knowledge of God and futurity; the justice of God, as the governor of the world; divine revelation; God's hearing and answering prayer; the ministration of angels; the temptations of Satan; *and especially*, the sanctifying operations of the Spirit of God.

1. The soul of man is *immortal*; therefore, if it is good, it cannot be forever in a bad condition. An immortal spirit is "a distinct, self-conscious, invisible being, endowed with natural powers of never-ceasing action, understanding, and will, and it is neither annihilated nor destroyed by separation of parts." Such is the soul of man. If our spirits were not inactive and useless in this flesh, we have no reason to think they will be inactive and useless hereafter, and forever. Though we may know the immortality of souls by the light of *nature*, without *supernatural* light we do not know what manner of action they will have in their separated state. It satisfies me that God will not continue their noblest powers in vain; how those powers will be exercised is known to him; and his *word* tells us this, more than our nature tells us. All things considered, there is no reason to fear that souls will lose their activity, even though they change their manner of action; and so it is naturally certain that they are immortal. And if holy souls are so far immortal, then their holiness must prove their happy immortality. The most just and holy God will certainly secure this to those whom he makes holy.

2. The belief of the soul's immortality is naturally *implanted in all men*. Almost all pagan nations at this day, as well as the Mohammedans, believe it. As for the cannibals and savages, whose understandings are least improved, they are ignorant of it rather than disbelieving of it. Though some philosophers denied it, they were in every way inconsiderable. Though many others were doubtful, it was only a *certainty* which they professed to want, and not a *probability*. Most of the apostates from Christianity, besides those philosophers who have been its violent opposers, fully acknowledged it. Julian <sup>2</sup> was so persuaded of it, that with a view to it he exhorted his priests and the rest of his subjects to great strictness of life, and to see that the Christians did not exceed them. Indeed, few of those who affect to disbelieve it, like the Sadducees, are able to free themselves from the fears of future misery; but with all their efforts, conscience still troubles them. And from where should all this be in man, and not in beasts, if man had no more cause for hopes and fears than they do?

3. God has made it every man's duty to seek future happiness as the one thing needful, and therefore there must certainly be such a happiness for those who truly seek it. Some believe there is a state of future retribution — such as Christians, Mohammedans, and most heathens. Others think it is uncertain, yet very probable. And to others it is also uncertain, though they rather think it is untrue. Now, all these ought to seek after it, and make it their chief care and labor. For natural reason requires every man to seek that which is best, with the greatest diligence. And natural reason assures us that a probability or possibility of future everlasting happiness is better, and more worthy to be sought, than anything attainable in this present

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<sup>2</sup> Julian (c. 331-363) was Roman emperor from A.D. 361 to 363, nephew of Constantine the Great, and a noted scholar and military leader; he was proclaimed emperor by his troops. A persistent enemy of Christianity, he publicly announced his conversion to paganism in 361, thus acquiring the epithet "the Apostate." — *Ency. Brit.*

life. As the will of man necessarily desires happiness, it must most desire that which is best, and which is known to be so. In this life there is nothing certain for even an hour. It is certain that the longest life is short. It is certain that time and sensual pleasure, when past, are nothing, and no better than if they had never been. It is also certain that they are dissatisfying while we possess them. For carnal pleasure is no sweeter to a man than to a beast, and to a beast it is unattended with fear of death, or any misery after death. Nor does the beast have any labors, sufferings, or trials in order to obtain a future happiness, or avoid a future misery. Besides, it is self-evident, from the perfections of God, and from the nature of his works, that he does not make it man's natural duty to care and labor most for that which is not, or to seek what is not to be attained. If it were so, then the duty of man would result from deceit and falsehood; and God would govern the world by a lie, and not by power, wisdom, and love. And the better any man was, and the more he did his duty, the more he would be only deluded and miserable: and the more wicked and unbelieving any man was, the wiser and happier he would be. But all this is contrary to the perfections and works of God; for he makes nothing in vain, nor can He lie: much less will he make holiness itself, and all that duty and work of life which reason obliges all men to perform, to be not only in vain, but pernicious.

4. The difference *between men and brutes*, with respect to the knowledge of God and futurity, shows that they differ as much in their hopes. Man knows that there is a God by His works; and that this God is our Lord, our ruler, and end, and that we naturally owe him all our love and obedience; and he knows that it is not the manner, even of good men, ever to suffer their most faithful servants to be losers by their fidelity, or to set them upon laboring in vain. Man also knows that his own soul is immortal, and therefore it must be well or ill forever, and that this soul ought to be cared for. And why should God give man all this knowledge more than the brutes, if man is designed for no more happiness than brutes? Every wise man makes his work fit for its design; and will not God do so? If God was not perfectly wise, he would not be God. Therefore to deny man's future hopes, is to deny God himself.

5. From the *justice of God* as the governor of the world, we infer a state of future retribution. If God did not govern man by laws, judgment, and executions, there would be no proper law of nature, and man would have no proper duty, nor be in sin or fault. But experience tells us that God morally governs the world; and his right to do so is unquestionable. If God was not the ruler of the world, the world would have no universal laws, for no man is the universal ruler; nor are kings and other supreme powers utterly lawless and ungoverned. And if God is a ruler, he is just; otherwise he is not so good as he requires earthly princes to be. But how is God a righteous ruler, if he draws all men to him by deceit; if he obliges them to seek and expect a reward which he will never give; if he makes man's duty his misery; if he requires man to labor in vain; if he suffers the wicked to persecute and kill his servants, without punishing the one, and gloriously recompensing the other, in a future state?

6. The *gospel revelation* is the clear foundation of our faith and hope. God has not left us to the mere light of nature. "Christ has brought life and immortality to light." <sup>2Tim 1.10</sup> One greater than an angel was sent from heaven to tell us what is there, and which is the way, and to secure our hopes. He has conquered death, and entered before us, as our captain and forerunner, into the everlasting habitations. He has "all power in heaven and earth, and all judgment is committed to him." <sup>Mat 28.18; Joh 5.22</sup> All his word is full of promises of our future glory at the resurrection. Nor are we without assurance that the departing soul at death enters upon a state of joy and blessedness, as appears by the promise to the penitent thief on the cross; the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; Christ's telling the Sadducees that God "is not the God of the dead, but of the living;" <sup>Luk 20.38</sup> the translation of Enoch and Elijah, and the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration; our Lord's arguing, that "those who kill

the body are not able to kill the soul;" Mat 10.28 his "commending his spirit into his Father's hands," Luk 23.46 and its being in paradise, while his body was in the grave; his promising, "Where I am, there shall my servant also be," etc.; Joh 14.3 Stephen's seeing heaven opened, and his praying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;" Act 7.59 our having "come to the spirits of just men made perfect;" Heb 12.22 Paul's desiring to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better, and to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord; the blessedness of the dead who die in the Lord; the disobedient spirits being in prison, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah suffering the vengeance of eternal fire; also Christ's saying, "When you fail," that is, leave this world, "you shall be received into everlasting habitations." Luk 16.9

7. God's *hearing and answering prayer* in this life, assures his servants that he is their true and faithful Saviour. How often I have cried to him when there appeared to be no help in second causes; and how frequently, suddenly, and mercifully he has delivered me! Such extraordinary changes, beyond my own and others' expectations, while many plain-hearted, upright Christians, by fasting and prayer, sought God on my behalf — these have abundantly convinced me of a special providence, and that God is indeed a hearer of prayer. I have also seen wonders done for others by prayer more than for myself: though I and others are too much like those who "cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses; but they forgot his works, and his wonders that he showed them." Psa 107.6; 78.11 And what were all those merciful answers, but the fruits of Christ's power, faithfulness, and love, the fulfilling of his promises, and the earnest of the greater blessing of immortality which the same promises entitle me to?

8. The *ministration of angels* is also a help to my belief of immortality with Christ. They have charge over us; encamp round about us; bear us up in their hands; joy in the presence of God over our repentance; and are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. As our angels, they always behold the face of our Father which is in heaven. When the Son of man comes in his glory, all the holy angels shall come with him, and he shall send them forth, and they shall sever the wicked from among the just. Not only of old did they appear to the faithful as messengers from God, but God gives many mercies to us by their ministry. And that they are now so friendly and helpful to us, and make up one society with us, greatly encourages us to hope that we are made for the same region, employment, and converse. They were once in a life of trial, though not on earth; and having overcome, they rejoice in our victory. The world above us is not uninhabited, nor beyond our capacity and hope; but we "*have come to the city of the living God, and to an innumerable company of angels.*" Heb 12.22

9. Even *Satan himself*, by his temptations, has cherished my hopes of immortality in many ways. There are few men, I think, who observe what passes within them, who have not had some experience of such inward temptations as show their author is an invisible enemy; and assure us that there are diabolical spirits which seek man's misery by tempting him to sin; and consequently that future happiness, or misery, must be expected by us all.

10. More especially, the sanctifying operations of *the Spirit of God* are the earnest of heaven, and the sure prognostic of our immortal happiness. It is a change of grand importance to man, to be renewed in his mind, his will, and his life. It repairs his depraved faculties. It causes man to live as man, who was degenerated to a life too much like the brutes. Men are slaves to sin till Christ makes them free. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." 2Cor 3.17 If 'the love of God shed abroad in our hearts' is not our excellence, health, and beauty, then what is?

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Joh 3.6 "Without Christ" and his Spirit, "we can do nothing." Joh 15.5 Our dead notions and reason,

though we see the truth, do not have power to overcome temptations, nor raise up man's soul to its original end, nor possess us with the love and joyful hope of future blessedness. It would be better for us to have no souls, than to have our souls devoid of the Spirit of God. *Heaven is the design and end of this important change.* What is our knowledge and faith, but to know and believe that heaven consists in the glory and love of God manifested there, and that it was purchased by Christ, and given by his covenant? What is our hope but "the hope of glory," which we wait for through the Spirit? What is our love but a desire of communion with the blessed God, begun here, and perfected hereafter? What Christ teaches and commands, he works in us by his Spirit. He does not send his Spirit to make men craftier than others for this world, but "wiser unto salvation," <sup>2Tim 3.15</sup> and more holy and heavenly. "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." <sup>Luk 16.8</sup> Heavenly-mindedness is the special work of the Spirit. In producing this change, the Spirit overcomes all opposition from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Christ first overcame the world, and he teaches and causes us to overcome it, even in its flatteries and its frowns. "Our faith is our victory." <sup>1Joh 5.4</sup> Whether this victory is easy and honorable to the Spirit of Christ, let us appeal to our experience of the wickedness of the world, and of our own weakness and falls. None can do this work on the soul of man but God. Not the most learned and holy teachers, nor the wisest and most affectionate parents, nor the greatest princes. Evil angels neither can nor will do it. Good angels do nothing towards it, except as obedient ministers of God. *We cannot quicken, illuminate, or sanctify ourselves.* And though we have some power, both conscience and experience testify that we have nothing but "what we have received." <sup>1Cor 4.7</sup> Christ promised his Spirit to all true believers, to be in them as His advocate, agent, seal, and mark. And indeed, the Spirit here, and heaven hereafter, are the chief of Christ's promises. That this Spirit is given to all true believers, is evident by the effects of it. They have ends, affections, and lives that are different from the rest of mankind. They live upon the hope of a better life. And their heavenly interest overrules all the opposite interests of this world, in order to which they live under the conduct of divine authority. To obey and please God is the great business of their lives. The men of the world discern this difference, and therefore they hate and oppose them, because they find themselves condemned by their heavenly temper and conversation. Believers are conscious of this difference, for they desire to be better, and to trust and love God more, and to have more of the heavenly life and comforts. And when their infirmities make them doubt their own sincerity, they would not change their governor, rule, or hopes for all the world. It is never so well and pleasant with them as when they can trust and love God most; and in their worst and weakest condition, they would gladly be perfect. Indeed, whatever real goodness is found among men, it is given by the same Spirit of Christ. But it is notorious that in heavenly-mindedness and virtue, no part of the world is comparable to serious Christians. Christ also expressly promised this Spirit as the means and pledges, the first-fruits and earnest, of the heavenly glory. Therefore it is a certain proof that we shall *have* such a glory. He that gives us such a spiritual charge, which in its nature and tendency is heavenly; He that sets our hopes and hearts on heaven, and turns the endeavors of our lives towards future blessedness; He that promised this preparatory grace as the earnest of that felicity, may well be trusted to perform His word in our complete, eternal glory.

And now, O weak and fearful soul, why should you draw back, as if the matter was doubtful? Isn't your foundation firm? Isn't the way of life, through the valley of death, made safe by Him who conquered death? Are you not yet delivered from the bondage of your fears? Have you not long ago found in yourself the motions and effectual operations of this Spirit? And is He not still residing and working in you as the agent and witness of Christ? If not, where do your groanings after God come from, your desires to be nearer to his glory, to know him and to love him more? Where did all the pleasure you have had in His sacred truth and ways and



service come from? Who subdued for you your folly, pride, and vain desires? Who made it your choice to sit at the feet of Jesus, and hear his word as the better part, and count the honors and preferments of the world but dung and dross? Who breathed in all those requests that you have sent up to God? Do not overvalue corrupt nature; it brings forth no such fruits as these. Remember what you were in the hour of temptation, how small a matter has drawn you to sin. Do not forget the days of your youthful vanity. Do not overlook the case of your sinful neighbors, who in the midst of light still live in darkness, and do not hear the loudest calls of God. Is it no work of Christ's Spirit that has made you to differ? You have nothing to boast of, and much to be humbled and also to be thankful for. Your holy desires are, alas, too weak, but they are *holy*. Your love has been too cold; but it is the most holy God whom you have loved. Your hopes have been too low; but you have hoped in God, and for his heavenly glory. Your prayers have been too dull and interrupted; but you have prayed for holiness and heaven. Your labors have been too slothful; but you have labored for God and Christ, and the good of mankind. Though your motion was too weak and slow, it has been Godward, and therefore *it is from God*. O bless the Lord, not only for giving you His word and sealing it with uncontrolled miracles, but also for frequently and remarkably fulfilling his promises in the answer of your prayers, and in the great deliverance of yourself and of many others; and that he has by regeneration been preparing you for the light of glory. And will you yet doubt and fear, against all this evidence, experience, and foretaste? I think it is no needless labor to confirm my soul in the full persuasion of the truth of its immortal nature, and of a future life of joy or misery, and of the certain truth of the Christian faith. I can no more doubt the being and perfections of God, than whether there is an earth or a sun. *Christianity is only known by revelation*, which is so attested externally to the world, internally to holy souls, as to make faith a ruling, victorious, and comfortable principle. But the soul's immortality and future reward is known in some measure by the light of nature, and more perfectly by revelation. When I consider the great unlikeness of men's hearts and lives to such a belief as we all profess, I can but fear that not only the ungodly, but most who truly hope for glory, have a far weaker belief in the soul's immortality, and the truth of the gospel, than they are apt to imagine. Can I be fully persuaded of the future rewards and punishments of souls, and that we shall be judged hereafter as we have lived here, without despising all the vanities of the world, and setting my heart with resolution and diligence toward a holy, heavenly, fruitful life? Who could stand trifling, as most men do, at the door of eternity, if he truly believed his immortal soul must shortly be there? Though such a one had no certainty of his own salvation, he would nevertheless search and try, watch and pray, and spare no care, cost, or labor, to make it all sure. If a man once saw heaven and hell, would he not afterwards exceed the most resolute believer? I confess there is much weakness of faith in things unseen, even where there is sincerity. But where there is little diligence regarding the world to come, I must think there is but little belief in it, and that such persons are not aware of how much they secretly doubt the truth of it. Most complain of the uncertainty of their title to salvation, and complain very little of their uncertainty as to whether there is a heaven and a hell. Whereas a hearty persuasion of their existence would do more to convince them of their title to salvation, than long examinations and many marks of trial. It would indeed confound faith and reason, if in the body we had as clear and lively apprehensions of heaven and hell as sight would occasion — nor is the soul fit to bear such a sight while in the body. Yet there is an overruling seriousness, to which the soul must be brought by a firm persuasion of future things. The one who is careful and serious for this world, and looks for a better one only as a secondary object, must give me leave to think that he believes only as he lives, and that his *doubt* of a heaven and a hell, is greater than his *belief* of them.

O then, for what should my soul pray more than for a clearer and stronger faith? “I believe; Lord, help my unbelief.” <sup>Mar 9.24</sup> I have many thousands of times groaned to you under this burden of remaining darkness and unbelief. I have many thousands of times thought of the evidences of Christianity, and of the necessity of a lively, powerful, active faith. I have cried to you night and day, ‘Lord, increase my faith.’ <sup>Luk 17.5</sup> I have written and spoken that to others, which might be most useful to myself, and render my *faith* more like *sense*. Yet, Lord, how dark is this world! What a dungeon is flesh! How little clearer are my perceptions of things unseen, than they were long ago! Is no more growth of them to be expected? Does the soul no more increase in vigorous perception, when the body no more increases in the vigor of sensation? Must I sit down with so slow a measure, when I am almost there: where faith is changed for sight? O let not a soul that is driven from this world, and weary of vanity, and can think of little else but immortality; a soul that seeks and cries both night and day for the heavenly light, and would gladly have some foretaste of glory, and some more of the first-fruits of the promised joys — let not such a soul either long, or cry, or strive in vain. Do not punish my former grieving of your Spirit, by deserting a soul that cries for your grace, so near its great and inconceivable change. Let me not languish in vain desires at the door of hope; nor pass with doubts and fears from this vale of misery. Which should be the season of triumphant faith and hope and joy, if not when I am *entering* upon the world of joy? O You who have left us so many words of promise, ‘that our joy may be full,’ <sup>2Joh 1.12</sup> send, *send* the Comforter. For without his heavenly beams, after a thousand thoughts and cares, it will still be night and winter with my soul.

But I fear a distrust of God and my Redeemer has had too great a part in my desires for a more distinct knowledge than God ordinarily gives to souls in the flesh. I know that I should implicitly, absolutely, and quietly commit my soul into my Redeemer’s hands; for a distrustful care of the soul, as well as the body, is our great sin and misery. Yet we must desire that our knowledge and belief may be as distinct as divine revelations are. We can love no further than we know; and the more we know of God and glory, the more we shall love, desire, and trust. If I may not be ambitious of too sensible and distinct a foretaste of things unseen, yet I must desire and beg the most fervent love of them of which I am capable, so that my soul may not pass with distrust and terror, but pass to everlasting pleasures with suitable triumphant hopes. O Father of lights, who gives wisdom to those who ask, do not shut up this sinful soul in darkness. Leave me not to grope in unsatisfied doubts at the door of celestial light. Do not deny me now the lively exercise of faith, hope, and love, which are the stirrings of the new creature, the dawns of eternal day, and the earnest of the promised inheritance. Though, like Cicero after reading Plato’s book on immortality, our doubts may return, and our fear may interrupt and weaken our desires and joys, yet I find that it is chiefly an *irrational* fear, occasioned by the darkness of the mind, the greatness of the change, the dreadful majesty of God, and man’s natural aversion to death — even when reason is fully satisfied that such fear is consistent with certain safety. If I were on the top of a castle or steeple, fastened by the strongest chains, or guarded by the surest battlements, I could not possibly look down without fear; and so it is with our prospect into the life to come. If my soul therefore sees undeniable evidence of immortality, and is able by irrefutable arguments to prove a future blessedness; and if I am convinced that divine promises are true, and I entrust my soul and all my hope upon them; then neither my averseness to die, nor my irrational fear of entering upon eternity, can invalidate the reasons for my hope, nor prove the unsoundness of my faith, but only the *weakness* of it. “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” <sup>Mat 8.26</sup> was Christ’s just reproof to his disciples. A timorous heart needs to be chided by saying, “Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God,” etc. <sup>Psa 42.5</sup>

### CHAPTER 3. WHAT IT IS TO DEPART, AND TO BE WITH CHRIST.

**I.** To be with Christ includes, 1. His PRESENCE; 2. UNION to Him; 3. COMMUNION with Him and with his glorified saints. **II.** In order to be with Christ, we must depart, 1. from the body; 2. from former bodily enjoyments; and 3. from the more rational pleasures of learning, friendship, means of grace, and acquaintance with worldly affairs. The author has no fear that the church will miss him. He desires chiefly to submit to a separation from the body, and laments his soul's attachment to flesh and sense.

Having proved that faith and hope have a certain future happiness to expect, the text directs me next to consider what it is to be with Christ; and what it is to depart *in order* to be with him.

**I.** To be with Christ, includes PRESENCE with Him, UNION to Him, and PARTICIPATION in His happiness.

1. The *presence* of Christ, which pious separated spirits shall enjoy, must refer to his Godhead as well as to his human soul and body. We shall be present with the divine nature of Christ, as manifested in and by his glory. He teaches us to pray, "Our Father, which art in heaven," because in heaven the Father gloriously shines forth to holy souls. The soul of man is eminently said to be in the *head*, because there it understands and reasons; and not in the foot or hand, though it is also there.

Just as we look a man in the face when we talk to him, so we look up to heaven when we pray to God. Though "*in God* we live, and move, and have our being," <sup>Act 17.28</sup> both as the God of nature and grace, yet by the works and splendor of his glory he is eminently *in heaven*, manifesting himself there by some created glory; for his essence is the same everywhere. We shall be present with the human nature of Christ, both soul and body. But here our present narrow thoughts must not too boldly presume to determine the difference between Christ's glorified body, and his flesh upon earth; nor where his glorified body is, nor how far it extends; nor in what his soul and his glorified body differ, seeing that it is called a *spiritual* body. We can conceive no more of such a body than that it is pure, incorruptible, invisible to mortal eyes, and fitted to the most perfect state of the soul. Nor need we wonder how a whole world of glorified bodies can all be present with the one body of Christ. For as the solar beams are so present with the air that none can discern the difference of the places which they possess, and a world of bodies are present with them both, so may all our bodies, without any confusion, be present with Christ's body.

2. The *union* to Christ which pious separated spirits shall also enjoy, must be like that of subjects to their king; but how much more, we do not know. The more spiritual, pure, and noble any natures are, the more inclination they have to union. Such instances of union as the vine and branches, the head and members, are of extensive import; yet being only similitudes, we cannot determine how extensive. Far be it from us to think that Christ's glorified body is of such an earthly composition, and of such a limited extent, as it was *here*. For then, as his disciples and a few more were present with him, while the rest of the world were absent and had none of his company, so it would be in heaven. But all true believers, from the creation to the end of the world, as well as a Paul, shall "be with Christ, and see his glory." <sup>Phi 1.23; 1Joh 3.2</sup> And though there will be different degrees of glory, as there have been of holiness, yet none in heaven are at such a distance from Christ as not to enjoy the felicity of his presence.

3. "We shall also have *communion* with the divine and human natures of Christ; both of which shall be the felicitating objects of perfect knowledge and holy love to the separated spirits, before the resurrection. The chief part of this communion will consist in Christ's

communications to the soul. As the whole creation is more dependent on God than the fruit on the tree, or a plant on the earth, or the members on the body, so God uses second causes in his communications to inferior natures. And it is more than probable that Christ's human nature is the second cause of communicating both grace and glory, both to man in the body *and* to the separated soul. As the sun is both the cause and the object of sight to the eye, so is Christ to the soul. For as God, so the Lamb, is the light and glory of the heavenly Jerusalem, and in his light they shall have light. Christ shall give up the kingdom to the Father, so that God may be "all in all," <sup>1Cor 15.28</sup> and his creatures be fully restored to his favor, and a healing government for recovering lapsed souls to God shall no longer be needed. Yet surely he will not cease to be our Mediator, the church's Head, and the channel of everlasting light, life, and love to all his members. As "we now live because he lives," <sup>1Joh 3.24</sup> like the tranches in the vine.<sup>3</sup> And as the Spirit that now quickens, enlightens, and sanctifies us, is first the Spirit of *Christ* before it is *ours*, and is communicated from God through Him to us, so will it be in the state of glory. *There* our union and communion with him will be perfected, and not destroyed or diminished. As it would be arrogance to think we will be above the need and use of Christ and his communications, so I have no doubt we shall ever have use for one another. This is plainly intimated by "sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God;" <sup>Mat 8.11</sup> by being "in Abraham's bosom;" <sup>Luk 16.23</sup> by "sitting at Christ's right and left hand in his kingdom;" <sup>Mat 20.21</sup> by being "made ruler over ten cities;" <sup>Luk 19.17</sup> and by joining with those who "sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb." <sup>Rev 15.3</sup>

And certainly, if I am "with Christ," I shall be with *all those* who are with Christ, even with all the heavenly society. Our mortal bodies must have so much room, that the earth is little enough for all its inhabitants. So narrow is our capacity for communion here, that those of the antipodes, or on the opposite side of the earth, are almost as strange to us as if they were in another world. What strangers we are to those of another kingdom, county, or parish, and even of another house. But we have great cause to think, by many scriptural expressions, that our heavenly union and communion will be nearer and more extensive, and that all the glorified shall know each other. It is, I confess, a pleasant thought to me, and greatly helps my willingness to die, to think that I shall go to all the holy ones, both Christ and angels and pious separated spirits. They are each of them better and more amiable than I am. Many are better than one, and the perfect whole is better than a sinful part, and the new Jerusalem is the glory of the creation. God has given me a love to all who are holy, for their holiness; and a love to the work of love and praise which they continually and perfectly perform; and a love to his celestial habitation, to His glory shining there. My old acquaintance with many a holy person who has gone to Christ, makes my thoughts of heaven more familiar to me. O how many of them could I name! And it is no small encouragement to someone who is to enter upon an unseen world, to think that he goes upon no untrodden path, nor enters into a solitary or singular state, but follows all who from the creation to this day have passed by death into endless life. O how emboldening to consider that I am to go the same way, and to the same place and state, with all the believers and saints who have ever gone before me!

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**II.** But I must *depart* before I can thus "be with Christ." I must, particularly, depart from this body, from all its former delights, and also from more rational pleasures belonging to the present life and world.

1. I must depart *from this body*. Here these eyes must see no more, this hand move no more, these feet walk no more, this tongue speak no more. As much as I have loved, and over-loved

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<sup>3</sup> A tranche is a slice, alluding to being grafted into the Vine; "apart from me you have no life." (Joh 6.53 cf. 15.5)

this body, I must leave it to the grave. There it must lie and rot in darkness, as a neglected and loathsome thing. This is the fruit of sin, and nature would not have it so.

But it is only my shell, my tabernacle, my clothing, and not my soul itself. It is only a dissolution — earth to earth. It is but an instrument laid aside when all its work is done — a servant dismissed when his service is ended; as I cast my lute aside when I have better employment. It is but as flowers that die in autumn, and plants in winter. It is but a separation from a troublesome companion, and putting off a shoe that pinched me. I have had many a sad and painful hour, many a weary night and day. What cares and fears, what griefs and groans, has this body cost me! Alas, how much of my precious time has been spent to maintain, please, or repair it! Often I have thought it cost me so dear to live, indeed, to live a painful, weary life, that were it not for the higher ends of life, I had little reason to be much in love with it, or be loath to leave it. To depart from such a body is but to remove from a sordid habitation. I know it is the curious, wonderful work of God, and not to be despised or unjustly dishonored, but admired and well used. Yet our reason wonders that so noble a spirit should be so meanly housed, for we must call it “our vile body.” <sup>Phi 3:21</sup> To depart from such a body is but to be “loosed from the bondage of corruption,” from the clog and prison of the soul. That body, which was a fit servant to the soul of innocent man, has now become like a prison.

And further, to depart from such a body is but to be separated from an incidental enemy, and one of our greatest and most hurtful enemies — not indeed as the work of our Creator, but as the effect of sin. What could Satan, or any other enemy of our souls, have done against us without our flesh? What is it but the interest of this body that stands in competition with the interest of God and our souls? What else do the profane sell their heavenly inheritance for, such as Esau his birthright? What else is the bait of ambition, covetousness, and sensuality? What takes up the thoughts and cares which we should lay out upon spiritual and heavenly things, but this body and its life? What steals away men’s hearts from the heavenly pleasures of faith, hope, and love, but the pleasures of this flesh? This draws us to sin, and hinders us from and in our duty. If it were not for bodily interests and temptations, how much more innocent and holy I might live. I would have nothing to care for, but to please God and be pleased in him, were it not for the care of this bodily life. What employment would my will and love have but to delight in God, and love him and his interest, if it were not for the love of the body and its concerns? By this the mind is darkened, the thoughts diverted, our wills corrupted, our heart and time alienated from God, our guilt increased, our heavenly desires and hopes destroyed — life is made unholy and uncomfortable, and death terrible. God and souls are separated, and eternal life is neglected and in danger of being utterly lost. I know that in all this, the sinful soul is the chief cause and agent; but isn’t bodily interest its temptation, bait, and end? Isn’t the body and its life and pleasure, the chief alluring cause of all this sin and misery? And shall I take such a body to be better than heaven, or refuse to be loosed from so troublesome a yoke-fellow, and separated from so burdensome and dangerous a companion?

2. I must depart from all the former *pleasures* of this body. I must taste no more sweetness in food or drink, in rest or action, or any such thing as now delights me. Houses and lands, goods and wealth, must all be left; and the place where I live must know me no more. All I labored for, or took delight in, must be no more to me than if they had never been. But consider, O my soul, your former pleasures are already past. You lose none of them by death, for they were all lost before, unless immortal grace has made them immortal by sanctifying them. All that death does to them is to prevent the repetition of them on earth. Isn’t the pleasure which we lose by death common to every brute? Food is as sweet to them, and ease as welcome, and appetite as vehement. Why then should it seem hard to us to lose that, when God pleases,

which we deprive the brutes of at our pleasure? If we are believers, we only exchange these delights of life for the greater delights of a life with Christ, a comfort which our fellow-creatures the brutes have not. Are not the pleasures of life usually imbittered with such pain that they seldom countervail the attending vanity and vexation? It is true, nature desires life under sufferings that are tolerable, rather than die; but that is not so much from the sensible pleasure of life, as from mere natural inclination to life which God has implanted in us. Don't we willingly interrupt these pleasures every night when we take ourselves to sleep? To say that rest is my pleasure, is but to say that my daily labors and cares are so much greater than my waking pleasures, that I am glad to lay aside both together. If we can thus be content every night to die, as it were, to all our waking pleasures, then why should we be unwilling to die to them all at once? If they are forbidden pleasures which you are unwilling to leave, those must be left before you die, otherwise it would be better never to have been born. Every wise and godly man casts them off with detestation. Indeed, the same cause which makes men *unwilling to live a holy life*, has a great hand in making them *unwilling to die* — because they are loath to leave the pleasures of sin. If the wicked is converted, he must be gluttonous and drunken no more; he must live in pride, vanity, worldly-mindedness, and sensual pleasures no more. And therefore he draws back from a holy life as if it were from death itself. But what is this to those who “have mortified the flesh with the affections and lusts?” Gal 5.24 Consider also that these forbidden pleasures are the great impediments both of our holiness and of our truest pleasures. One of the reasons why God forbids them, is because they hinder us from better ones. If, for our own good, we must forsake them when we turn to God, we should therefore be more willing to die in order to be free from the danger of them, and especially since death will transmit us to infinitely greater pleasures.

3. I must also depart from the *more rational pleasures* which I have enjoyed in this body; for instance, from my present *studies*, which are delights far above those of sensual sinners. But let me consider how small is our knowledge compared with our ignorance; and how little the knowledge of the learned differs from the thoughts of a child. Just as trifles are the matter of childish knowledge, so artificial words and forms make up more of the learning of the world than is commonly understood. God and the life to come are little better known by the learned (and often much less), than by many of the unlearned. Of how little use is it to know what is contained in many hundreds of volumes that fill our libraries, and have given their authors the name of *virtuosi* — but not for their having the virtue to live to God, or to overcome temptations from the flesh and the world, and secure their everlasting hopes. Much of our reading and learning, alas, does us more harm than good. Many a precious hour is lost in them, that should be employed in *higher* pursuits. To many, I fear, it is as unholy a pleasure as others take in thinking of lands and honors — only it is more dangerous for being less suspected. I know the knowledge of natural things is valuable, and may be sanctified, and in some way made useful to my highest ends, and I would give any expense to procure more. But I must earnestly pray, “May the Lord forgive me the hours that I have spent in reading things that are less profitable, for the sake of pleasing a mind that would gladly know everything, instead of spending them for the increase of holiness in myself and others.” Yet I must thankfully acknowledge to God, that “from my youth You taught me to begin with things of the greatest weight, and to refer most of my other studies to it, and to spend my days under the motives of necessity and profit to myself, and to those who were committed to me.” I would have men most relish that learning in their *health*, which they will find sweetest in *sickness*, and *when near to death*. And alas, how expensive a vanity this knowledge is. Though it differs little from a pleasant dream, yet to attain a little excellence in it, how many laborious days and weeks it must cost us. “Much study is a weariness of the flesh, and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow.” Ecc 12.12 What painful diseases and loss of bodily ease and health

it has occasioned me. What envy and opposition it has exposed me to. And should a man be loath to die for fear of leaving such troublesome, costly, learning and knowledge? Let me especially consider that we shall certainly have a nobler, sweeter, and more extensive knowledge than is attainable here. Love never fails, and we can love no more than we know — “but prophecies shall fail; tongues shall cease; knowledge,” such as we now have, “shall vanish away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I also am known.” <sup>1Cor 13.8-12</sup> For though my knowledge will not be like that of the blessed God, it will be like that of holy spirits. In order for a physician to describe the disease of his patient, he needs much reading and close inquiry. And after all that, he goes much upon conjectures, and his knowledge is mixed with many uncertainties and mistakes. But when he opens the corpse, his knowledge is fuller and truer, and obtained with greater ease and speed. A countryman knows the town, fields, and rivers, plants and animals where he dwells, with ease, perspicuity, and certainty; when mere geographical knowledge is liable to many mistakes. So too, the sight of God and heaven will deserve the name of *wisdom*, while our present glimpse is but philosophy or the love of wisdom. We should not, therefore, fear death for fear of losing our knowledge; but rather, we should long for the world of glorious light, that we may get out of this darkness into easy, joyful, and *satisfying* knowledge.

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*Friendship* is one of the more rational pleasures enjoyed in this body, and from which I must depart.<sup>4</sup> He who doesn't believe that there are far more and better friends in heaven than there are on earth, does not believe as he should, that there is a heaven. Our friends here are wise, but they are also unwise. They are faithful, but partly unfaithful. They are holy, but alas, too sinful. They have the image of God, but it is blotted and dishonored by their faults! They do God and his church much service, but they also do too much for Satan, even when they intend the honor of God. They promote the gospel; but they also hinder it by their weakness and ignorance, their selfishness, pride, and passion, their divisions and contentions. They are our helpers and comforters; but how often they are also our hinderance, trouble, and grief. In heaven they are perfectly wise and holy and faithful, and there is nothing in them, nor done by them, except what is amiable to God and man. Along with our faithful friends, we have here a mixture of those who are useless and burdensome, or hypocritical and malicious. But in heaven there are none but the wise and holy — no hypocrites, no burdensome neighbors, no treacherous, oppressive, or persecuting enemies. Christ loved his disciples, his kindred, and all mankind, and took pleasure in doing good to all; and so did his apostles. But how poor a recompense he or they had from anyone but from God. Christ's “brethren did not believe in him.” <sup>Joh 7.5</sup> Peter denied him. “All his disciples forsook him and fled.” <sup>Mat 26.56</sup> And what then could be expected from others? No friends have a perfect suitableness to each other; and those inequalities that are nearest to us, are the most troublesome. So various and contrary are our apprehensions, interests, educations, our tempers, inclinations, and temptations, that instead of wondering at the discord and confusions of the world, we may rather admire the providence of God which maintains so much order and concord. The greatest *crimes* that have been charged upon me have been those things which I thought to be my greatest *duties*. And for

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<sup>4</sup> Baxter doesn't mention family or spouse. In 1662 at age 47, he married Margaret Charlton, one of his converts, who was in her early twenties. Despite the difference in ages, and his health issues (consumption), they had an excellent marriage; but no children. She died in 1681, two years before this was published. As to departed spouses, Christ tells us, “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.” (Mat 22:30) As to elect infants, they are sanctified to God in the womb (Jer 1.5 *cf.* Rom 9.10-15), and cannot be lost (Eph 1.4; Joh 6.39). Beyond that, Scripture is silent — though that has never kept some from speculating or inventing. — WHG

those parts of my obedience to God and my conscience, which cost me dearest, and where I pleased my flesh least, I pleased the world least. And is this tumultuous, militant world a place that I should be loath to leave?

I must depart from all the *means of grace*, though more precious to me than all earthly enjoyments. Shall I love the *name* of heaven better than heaven *itself*? Isn't the *possession* of glory better than the *promise* of it? If a light and guide through the wilderness is good, then surely the glorious end must be better. It has pleased God that all things on earth, even the sacred Scriptures, should bear the marks of our state of imperfection. Imperfect persons were the penmen. Imperfect human language is the conveyance. Heaven will not, to perfect spirits, be made the occasion of so many errors and controversies as the Scriptures are to us imperfect mortals. Yes, heaven is more desirable because there I shall better understand the Scriptures than I can ever hope to do here. To leave my Bible and go to the God and heaven which the Bible reveals, will not be my loss other than to leave the *picture* for the *presence* of my Friend. As for mere human writings and instructions, the pleasure of my mind is much abated by their great imperfection; and why should I think that my own are blameless? I must forever be thankful for the holy instructions and writings of others, notwithstanding human frailty. And so must I be thankful that God has made any use of my own for the good of souls and the edification of His church. But how many alloys there are to such comforts! If good men, and good books or sermons, make the world seem over-lovely, it will be the mercy of God to abate the temptation. When we are dead to the love of the godly themselves, of learning, books, and ordinances — so far as they serve a selfish interest and tempt our hearts from heavenly aspirations — then indeed “the world is crucified to us, and we to it.” Gal 6.14

Of all things, a departing soul has least cause to fear losing the knowledge of *worldly affairs*. If the sun gives light and heat to the earth, why should I think that blessed spirits have no acquaintance with earthly concerns? <sup>1Pet 1.12</sup> From the top of a hill I can see more than from below; and would I know less of earth from heaven than I do now? <sup>Rev 6.9-10</sup> It is unlikely that my capacity will be so little, or that Christ and all the angels will be so strange to me, as to give me no notice of things so interesting to my God and Redeemer, to the holy society of which I am member, and to myself as a member of that society. Spirits are most active, and of quick and powerful communication. They do not need to send letters, write books, or lift up a voice. And as with their activity, so unity is greatest where there is most perfection. Their knowledge, love, and joy will be *one*. My celestial advancement, therefore, will be no diminution, but an inconceivable increase of my desirable knowledge of things on earth. If indeed I will know *less* of things below, it will be because knowledge of them is a part of vanity and vexation, which have no place in heaven. I need not be afraid to hear any more of bloody wars, desolated countries, dissipated churches, persecuted Christians, silenced preachers, party conflicts, contentious divines, censorious professors of religion, along with the cries of the poor, or the endless complaints of the melancholy.

Nor need I fear what other men are pleased to suggest: that the church will miss me. Is it I, or is it *God* who must choose his servants, and cut out their work? Am I doing God's work, or my own? If it is God's, must he not say what, and when, and how long? And won't His will and choice be best? If I don't believe this, how do I take him for my God? Is it God, or I, who knows best what is yet to be done, and who is fittest to do it? What am I to those more excellent persons whom in all ages God has taken out of the world? Haven't many servants of Christ died in their youth, who were far more likely to win souls and glorify God than I am, or ever have been? And shall I, at seventy-six years of age, after such a life of unspeakable mercies, and after almost fifty-three years of comfortable help in the service of my Lord, now be afraid of my reward, and shrink at the sentence of death, and still be desirous to stay here under a



pretence of further service? <sup>5</sup> We don't know what is best for the church, as God does. The church and the world are not ours, but His: not *our* desires, therefore, but His will must measure out its mercies. Nothing ever lay so heavy on my heart as the sin and misery of mankind, and to think how much of the world lies in folly and wickedness. And for what can I so heartily pray, as for the world's recovery? And it is His will that I should show a holy and universal love by praying, "Let your name be hallowed; your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Yet, alas, how unlike earth is to heaven! "What sin and ignorance, confusion and cruelties, reign and prosper here! Without a wonderful change, even by a general miracle, how little hope appears that these prayers might ever be answered. Indeed, it makes *us* better, to desire that *others* may be better. And God seems to permit the ignorance and confusion of this world, to help us more value and desire the world of light, love, and order. If I am in any way useful to the world, undeserved mercy has made me so, for which I must be thankful. How long I shall be so, is not my business to determine, but my Lord's.

As God will be served and pleased by a wonderful variety of animals and vegetables, so he will by their successive generations. If one flower falls or dies, others in future summers shall arise from the same root. God will have other generations to succeed us; let us thank Him that we have had our time. And if we could without selfishness love others as ourselves, and God as God, it would comfort us at death to have others survive us, and the world continue, and God still be God, and be glorified in his works. Love would say, "I shall live in my successors; I shall more than live in the life of the world; and most of all, in the eternal life and glory of God." Nor will God try us with too long a life of temptations, lest we grow too familiar where we should be strangers, and be utterly strangers to our home. No wonder the world was ready for a deluge, by a deluge of sin — when men lived six, seven, eight, or nine hundred years. Had our great sensualists any hope of living so long, they would be like incarnate devils. There would be no dwelling near them for the godly. Nor will God tire us with too long a life of afflictions. And will we grudge at the wisdom and goodness which *shortens* them? Though holy duties are excellent and delightful, yet the *weakness of the flesh* makes us liable to weariness, and it abates the *willingness of the spirit*. <sup>Mat 26.41</sup> By our weariness and complaints, our fears and groans, we seem to think this life is too long. And yet, when we should yield to the call of God, we draw back as if we would have it be everlasting.

Willingly submit, then, my soul. It is not yourself, but this flesh that must be dissolved — this troublesome, vile, and corruptible flesh. Study your duty; work while it is day; and let God choose your time and willingly stand to His disposal. When I die, the gospel does not die; the church does not die; the praises of God do not die; the world does not die. But perhaps it will grow better, and those prayers be answered which seemed to be lost. And perhaps some of the seed I have sown will spring up when I am dead. If my end was to do good and glorify God, then when good is done and God is glorified, even if I am annihilated, isn't my end attained? "Lord, let your servant depart in peace," <sup>Luk 2.29</sup> even in *your* peace, "which passes all understanding," <sup>Phi 4.7</sup> and which Christ, the Prince of peace gives, and which nothing in the world can take away. O give me that peace which suits a soul who is so near the harbor, even the world of endless peace and love. Call home this soul by the encouraging voice of love, so that it may joyfully hear, and say, "It is my Father's voice." Invite it to you by the heavenly messenger. Attract it by the tokens and foretastes of love. The messengers who invited me to the feast of grace, compelled me to come in without constraint. Your effectual call made me willing. And isn't glory better than the grace which *prepares* for it? Shall I not more willingly come to the celestial feast? What was your grace for, if not to make me desirous of glory, and

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<sup>5</sup> This book was first published in 1683, when Baxter was 68; he died at 76. So this is a later revision. — WHG

the way to it? Why did you dart down your beams of love, if not to make me love you, to call me up to the everlasting centre? Wasn't the feast of grace like a sacrament of the feast of glory? Didn't I take it in remembrance of my Lord till he comes? Didn't the one who told me, 'All things are ready,' also tell me, that 'He has gone to prepare a place for us, and that he would have us be with him, and see his glory?' Those who are given to him, and drawn to him by the Father on earth, *do* come to Christ. Give *now*, and draw my departing soul to my glorified Head. As I have glorified you on earth in the measure of your grace bestowed upon me, pardon the sins by which I have offended you, and glorify me in the vision and participation of my Redeemer's glory. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, with fuller life and light and love, into this too dead and dark and disaffected soul, so that with joyful willingness it may come to you.

Willingly depart, O lingering soul: it is from a Sodom. Even if there are righteous Lots in it, they are not without their sad blemishes. Have you so often lamented the general blindness and wickedness of the world, and are you loath to leave it for a better one? How often would you have rejoiced to see but the *dawning* of a day of universal peace and reformation! And would you not see it where it shines in perfect beauty? Have you prayed and labored so hard to have the pleasure of a light at midnight, and is it not your desire to behold the sun itself? Will the things of heaven please you nowhere but on earth, where they are least and weakest? Away, *away!* Vindictive flames are ready to consume this sinful world. Sinners are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Don't look behind, then. *Away* from this unhappy world! Press toward the mark, 'looking for and hastening to the coming of the day of God.' <sup>2Pet 3.12</sup> As this world has used you, so it would still do. When you have fared best in it, give no thanks to it, but to God. If you have had manifold deliverances and preservations, and have been fed with angels' food, don't love the wilderness, but your heavenly guide, protector, and deliverer. Does God in his great mercy make pain and feebleness the harbingers of death, and will you not understand their business? Would you dwell with your beloved body in the grave, where it will rot in loathsome darkness? If not, why should it *now*, in its painful languor, seem a more pleasing habitation to you, than the glorious presence of your Lord? In the grave it will be at rest. At night, don't wish that it were morning, nor in the morning say, "When will it be night?" And is this a dwelling fit for your delight? It is your duty to be patient in it while God so tries you. But is such patience a better and sweeter life, than rest and joy?

But alas, how deaf the flesh is to reason. I have reason enough to be willing to depart, even much more willing than I am. O that I could be as willing as reason convinces me I ought to be. If I could love God as much as I know I ought to love him, then I would desire to depart and to be with Christ, as much as I know I *ought* to desire it. But death must be a penalty even where it is a gain; and therefore it must meet with some unwillingness. Because we *willingly sinned*, we must *unwillingly suffer*. All the faith and reason in the world will not make death to be no penalty; and therefore it will not take away all unwillingness. No man ever reasoned or believed himself into a love of pain and death, as such. But since the gain is unspeakably greater than the pain and loss, faith and holy reason may therefore make our willingness greater than our unwillingness, and our hope and joy greater than our fear and sorrow. Come then, my soul, and think believingly what is best for you. And will you not most love and desire that which is certainly *best*? This will be the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4. WHY IT IS FAR BETTER TO BE WITH CHRIST.

It is far better, considering, 1. our preparation for it by the Father's love, the Son's purchase, and the Spirit's influences; by God's word, ordinances, and providences; and by various other means. 2. It is the end of all our preparations. 3. It perfects our knowledge of God and his works; of Christ, and redemption by him; of heaven and Scripture; of Providence, of ourselves, of our fellow-creatures; and of our enemies, sins, and dangers. 4. It perfects our will, conforming it to the will of God, and fixing it in his love. The author triumphs in the prospect of such happiness; traces it from God's love as the fountain, through the love of Christ as the channel, and through angels and saints as subordinate channels. 5. It perfects also our activity in doing good, particularly in praising God and Christ, and in beneficence to inferior creatures.

To *say* or *hear* that it is far better to be with Christ, is not enough to make us *willing*. If I firmly *believe* that it is best for me, then I shall desire it. And do I not have reason to believe it? Let me seriously consider, for my full conviction, by what means I am preparing for this happiness; how this happiness is the end for which I am preparing; and how it will perfect my knowledge, will, and activity in doing good.

1. *The means by which I am preparing* to be with Christ abundantly show that it is far better to be with him. For instance, that is best for me, which my heavenly Father's love designs and chooses for my good. I hope I will never dare to say or think that He is mistaken, or that I could have chosen better for myself. Many a time the wise and good will of God has crossed my foolish, rebellious will, and afterwards I have perceived it was best. It is not an enemy nor a tyrant that made me, preserves me, or calls me from here. The more I have tested Him, the better I have found him. Had I better obeyed his *ruling* will, how happy I would have been. And isn't his *disposing* and *rewarding* will as good? If I were not to die till myself or any of my dearest friends would have it, would this rejoice me? O foolish, sinful soul, isn't it far better to be at God's choice, than my own or any man's? Be of good cheer then, my soul; it is your Father's voice that calls you from here — His voice that called you into being, and out of a state of sin and death, and bid you live to Him — His voice that called you so often from the grave, forgave your sins, renewed your strength, restored you to the comforts of his house and service, and that has so graciously led you through this howling wilderness almost to the sight of the promised land. And won't you willingly go when such infinite love calls you? Aren't you desirous of His presence? Are you afraid to go to the one who is the only cure for your fears? What was it if not this *glory* to which he elected you? It was not to the riches and honors of this world, or to the pleasures of the flesh; but He chose you in Christ to an inheritance in glory! If God chose you to blessedness, don't refuse it yourself, nor behave like a refuser. That is my best state which my Saviour purchased, and promised as best. Just as he did not buy me with silver and gold, so neither did he live and die to make me rich and great in the world. Who have more of these than those who have least of Christ? Is it heaven that cost so dear a price as His merits, sacrifice, and intercession? Is that the end of so wonderful a design of grace, and shall I now be unwilling to receive the gift? That is best for me for which God's Holy Spirit is preparing me. He is not persuading me from day to day to love the world, but to come away from it, and to set my heart upon things above. And would I now undo all, or cross and frustrate all His operations? Has grace been so long preparing me for glory, and shall I be loath to take possession of it? If I am not willing, I am not yet sufficiently prepared.

If heaven isn't better for me than earth, God's word and ordinances have all been in vain. Surely, that is my best which is the gift of the better covenant; which is secured to me by so many sealed promises; and to which I am directed by so many sacred precepts, doctrines, and examples; and for which I have been called to hear and read, meditate, watch, and pray. Was

it fleshly interest, or a longer life of worldly prosperity which the gospel covenant secured to me, which the sacraments and Spirit sealed to me, which the Bible was written to direct me to, which ministers preached to me, which my books were written for, and for which I prayed and served God — or was it *not* for his grace on earth, and glory in heaven? And isn't it better for me to have the end of these means, than lose them and my hopes? Why have I used them, if I would not attain their end? That is my best state to which all God's fatherly providences tend. All his sweeter mercies and sharper corrections are to make me partaker of his holiness, and lead me to glory in the way in which my Saviour and all his saints have gone before me. All things work together for the best to me, by preparing me for that which is best indeed. Both calms and storms are to bring me to this harbor. If I take them only for themselves and for this present life, then I mistake them; I unthankfully vilify them, and lose their end, life, and sweetness. Every word and work of God, every day's mercies and changes, look at heaven and intend eternity. God leads me no other way. If I don't follow Him, then I forsake my *hope* in forsaking *Him*. And if I do follow him, shall I be unwilling to be at home, and arrive at the end of all this way?

Certainly, what is best for me is what God requires me to principally value, love, and seek. If my business in the world is only for the things of the world, then how vain a creature is man, and how little is the difference between waking and sleeping, life and death. Isn't it my duty to seek heaven with all the fervor of my soul and diligence of my life, and isn't it best to find it? *That* must be best for me, and all other things must be forsaken for its sake. It is folly to forsake the better for the worse. But Scripture, reason, and conscience tell me that all this world should be forsaken for the least hope of heaven, when they are in competition. A *possible* everlasting glory should be preferred before a *certainly* perishing vanity. I am sure this life will shortly be nothing to me, and therefore it is nothing now. Must I forsake all for my everlasting hopes, and yet be unwilling to enter on the full possession of them? That is likely to be our best which is our most mature state. Nature is ever tending towards perfection. Every fruit is best when it is ripe. And does God cause saints to grow to greater ripeness only to be useless? It is not credible. "Our souls return to God who gave them." And though he does not need them, he puts them to such heavenly uses as their maturity fits them for. Since love has ripened me for itself, shall I not willingly drop into its hand? That is likely to be best which has been most esteemed and desired by the wisest and holiest in all ages, and which all men at death admit to be best. Usually no men are worse than those who have no belief or hope of a life to come. And none are so holy, just, and sober, so charitable to others and so useful to mankind, as those who firmly believe and hope for a state of immortality. And shall I fear such a state? Isn't that my best state which most displeases my greatest enemies? I need not say how much Satan does to keep me and other men from heaven; and to that end, he tempts us with worldly honor, pleasure, and wealth. Satan would not have me get to heaven, and shall *I too* be unwilling? All these things tell me that it is best to be with Christ.

2. As the *end of all my preparation*, it must be far better for me to be with Christ. Isn't dwelling with God in glory far better than in this sinful world? He that is our beginning is our end. And for our end all means are used; the end attained is our soul's *rest*. How often has my soul groaned under a sense of distance, darkness, and alienation from God. How often has it looked up and panted after him, and said, "As the hart pants after the water-brooks, so my soul pants after you, O God." <sup>Psa 42.1</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before Him? "Whom do I have in heaven but you? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides you... It is good for me to draw near to God." <sup>Psa 73.25, 28</sup> Woe to me if I dissembled; and if not, why should my soul draw back? Is it because death stands in the way? And yet, isn't my passage secured by the love of my Father, and the resurrection and

intercession of my Lord? Can I see the light of heavenly glory in this darksome shell and womb of flesh? All creatures are more or less excellent and glorious, as God communicates most of himself to them. They are said to be nearest to Him, who have the noblest natures. Therefore to be as near as my nature was intended to approach, is but to attain the end and perfection of my nature. As I am now under the government of his officers on earth, so I expect to be in heaven. If the law was given by angels, and the Angel of God was in the burning bush, and the Angel conducted the people through the wilderness, and yet all these things are ascribed to God, then much nearer and more glorious will the divine government be in heaven. Here I am made, ruled, and sanctified for the good of many, as above my own. I am sure I must be finally for my glorified Redeemer, and that He who is the first, will be the ultimate cause. In this respect, I shall be as near to him as comports with the rank and order of my nature. It is the honor of a servant to have an honorable master, and to be appointed to the most honorable work. My advancement will be ultimately for God, and in such services as are suitable to my spiritual and heavenly state. Activity will be my perfection and my rest. Though now I do not know fully what service I must do, I know it will be good, and suitable to the blessed state I shall be in. It is not all the use and work of my soul to care for my body now, nor will it be hereafter. Though I shall not always have a body, I shall always have a God and a Saviour and a world of fellow-creatures. And when I do not shine in the lantern, nor see as in a mirror, I shall yet see face to face. To fulfil God's will here, would be the fulfilling of my own. I am sure my soul shall live, and that it shall live to God, and that I shall fulfil his blessed will; and so far as I am pleased in doing it, it will be my felicity.

The soul's regular love to the body illustrates the love of Christ to his church, and to every member. In this my Saviour excels me in powerful, faithful love. He will save me better from pain and death than I can save my body, and will more inseparably hold me to himself. If it pleases my soul to dwell in such a house of clay, how much more it will please my glorified Lord to dwell with his glorified body, the church triumphant, and to bless each member of it. It would be a kind of death to Christ to be separated from his body. And will he take incomparably greater pleasure in me forever than my soul does in my body? O then let me long to be with him. Though I am *naturally* loath to be absent from the body, let me not be *willingly* absent from the Lord. And though I would not be unclothed had sin not made it necessary, let me "groan to be clothed upon with my heavenly habitation," <sup>2Cor 5:2</sup> to become the delight of my Redeemer, and to be perfectly loved by love itself. The love and delight of my glorified Head must be my felicity. I shall be loved as a living spirit, and not as a dead and insensible thing. If I must rejoice here with those who rejoice, shall I not rejoice to have my Lord rejoice in me and in all his glorified ones? Union will make his pleasure to be much my own. It will fitly be said by him, "Enter into the joy of your Lord." <sup>Mat 25:21</sup> The heavenly society also will joyfully welcome a holy soul. If now "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents," <sup>Luk 15:7</sup> what will there be over a perfect glorified soul? If our "angels" there "behold our Father's face," <sup>Mat 18:10</sup> how glad they will be of our company. And will not love and union make their joy my own? Surely that will be *my* best condition, which angels and blessed spirits will best be pleased with; and in that in which they most rejoice, I shall most rejoice myself.

3. It is far better for me to be with Christ, as thereby *my knowledge will be perfected*. A soul that is with Christ is more likely to know Christ and the Father in him, than a soul that is present with the body and absent from the Lord. What less can the promise of being with him signify? How much more excellent intuitive or immediate knowledge will be, than our present artificial knowledge. There will be no expensive labor in getting it. It will have no mixture of dark and bewildering uncertainty and ambiguity when it is acquired. It will be perfectly free

from those contentions which so much rob the ingenious of their time, destroy their love, hinder their minds from ascending to God and heavenly things, and fill the church with sects and parties. Nor will it leave any of that dissatisfaction so common among the learned, while they have only the shadow of knowledge, licking but the outside of the glass, and leaving the wine within untasted. What an excellence there will be in each of the objects of this immediate knowledge.

For instance, *I shall know God better*. If an angel from heaven came down on earth to tell us all of God that we would know, who would not turn his back on libraries and universities, to go and discourse with such a messenger? For one hour's talk with him, what travel would I think is too far, or what cost too great? But here we must have only such intimations as will exercise faith, excite desire, and test us under the temptations of the world and the flesh. The *light of glory* is to reward the victory obtained by the conduct of the *light of grace*. God in great mercy even here begins the reward. Those who "follow on to know the Lord" <sup>Hos 6.3</sup> usually find such an increase of light does not consist in vain notions, but in the quickening and comforting knowledge of God, as will greatly encourage them, and draw them on to seek still more. If the pleasure that the mind has in common knowledge makes men spend successive years in traversing sea and land, or in turning over multitudes of tedious volumes, who then upon earth can possibly conceive how great a pleasure it will be for a glorified soul to see the Lord? All the pleasure I shall have in heaven in knowing any of the works of God, will be in my beholding God himself — his being, wisdom, love, and goodness, in those works. For he is the life and glory of them all. "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."

Mat 5.8

And doubtless it will be no small part of my delight to *know the universe better*. It is exceedingly pleasant to know the least particle of the works of God. With what diligence and delight men have endeavored to anatomize a body, even a small part of a carcass, in order to know and describe worms and insects, plants and minerals! But no man ever yet perfectly knew the nature and uses of the least of them. If indeed we clearly saw the nature and connection of every creature in sea or land, what a delightful spectacle this *spot* of the creation would be! And how much more to see the *whole* creation! I will have as much of this as I will be capable of. The wonders of God's works will raise my soul in admiring, joyful praise forever. We have desires for such knowledge in our present dark and infant state; for "the works of the Lord are great, sought out by all those who take pleasure in them." <sup>Psa 111.2</sup> As these desires are from God, as he has made his works to be known for his glory, and as little is known of them by mortals, they are therefore known by those in heaven, who are fitted to improve that knowledge to His praise. If Christ, the wisdom of God, will teach me the true philosophy of how to love God and please him in all things here, then in heaven I shall quickly be a perfect philosopher. Satan tempted Christ by "showing him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory," promising to "give him all, if he would worship him." <sup>Mat 4.8-9</sup> But God will show me more than Satan could show, and give me more of that which is best, than Satan could give.

Nor will it be the least of my felicity in heaven that *I shall better know Jesus Christ*, and all the *mystery of our redemption* by him. O beatifying knowledge, to know Him "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge!" <sup>Col 2.3</sup> to know the mystery of his eternal Godhead, of his created nature, and of the union of both, and to see God's wonderful design and gracious work in him, laid open to our clearest view! Then all the dark texts concerning his person, offices, and works will be fully understood. All those strange and difficult things which were the great exercise and honor of faith, will then be plain. Difficulties will no longer be to Satan's advantage, to tempt us to unbelief or doubting. The sight of the glory of my Lord will be my glory. If now, "though we do not see Christ, yet believing, we love him, and rejoice

in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory," <sup>1Pet 1.8</sup> what love and joy the everlasting sight of our blessed Head will excite there in the souls of all the glorified! I shall better — O how *much* better! — know the heavenly Jerusalem, the triumphant church, the blessed angels and glorified saints. What a sight, what a *joyful* sight death will show me, by drawing aside the veil; or rather the Lord of life will show me, by turning death to my advantage. As I now know the several rooms in my house, so I will then know the "many mansions" which Christ says "are in his Father's house." <sup>Joh 14.2</sup> If Nehemiah and the pious Jews rejoiced so much at seeing the walls of Jerusalem repaired, and others at the rebuilding of the temple, what a joyful sight I shall have of the heavenly Jerusalem!

I know that *angels* now love us, minister to us, rejoice in our good, and are themselves far more holy and excellent creatures than we are. It is therefore my comfort to think that *I shall better know them*, and live in near and perpetual acquaintance and communion with them, and bear my part in the same choir in which they preside. And when I think how sweet one wise and holy companion has been to me here on earth, and how lovely his graces have appeared, what a sight it will be, when we shall see the millions of "the spirits of just men made perfect," <sup>Heb 12.23</sup> shining with Christ in perfect wisdom and holiness! If this world was full of wise, just, and holy persons, how lovely it would be! If one kingdom consisted of such, it would make us loath to die and leave such a country, were it not that the more the beauty of goodness appears, the more the perfection of it is desired. It is pleasant to me to pray in hope that earth may be made more like heaven, which has now become so like hell. But when I shall see the society perfected in number, holiness, and glory, employed in the high and joyful praises of Jehovah — the glory of God and the Lamb shining on them, and God rejoicing over them as his delight, and myself partaking of the same — *that* will be the truly blessed day. And why does my soul, imprisoned in flesh, not desire it more?

*I will better understand all the word of God.* Though I will not have the use for it that I now have in this life of faith, yet I shall see more of God's wisdom and goodness, love, mercy, and justice, appearing in it, than ever man on earth could do. As the creatures, so the Scriptures are perfectly known only by perfect spirits. I shall then know how to solve all doubts, reconcile all seeming contradictions, and expound the hardest prophecies. That light will show me the admirable method of those sacred words where dark minds now suspect confusion. How joyfully I shall then praise my God and Saviour for giving his church so clear a light to guide them through this darksome wilderness, and so sure a promise to support them till they have come to life eternal! How joyfully I shall bless Him who, by that immortal seed, regenerated me to the hope of glory, and ruled me by so holy and just a law!

In that world of light *I shall better understand God's works of providence.* The wisdom and good of them is little understood in small parcels. It is the union and harmony of all the parts which displays their beauty. And no one can see the whole together but God, and those who see it in the light of his celestial glory. Then I shall clearly know why God prospered the wicked, and so much afflicted the righteous; why he set up the ungodly, and put the humble under their feet; why he permitted so much ignorance, pride, lust, oppression, persecution, falsehood, and other sins in the world; why the faithful are so few; and why so many kingdoms of the world are left in heathenism, Mohammedanism, and infidelity. I shall know why I suffered what I did, and how many great deliverances I had, and how they were accomplished. All our misinterpretations of God's works and permissions will then be rectified, and all our controversies about them be at an end.

Among all these works I shall especially *know more of the nature and excellence of God's mercies.* The lively sense of love and mercy makes lively Christians abound in love to God,

and in mercy to others. But the enemy of God and man labors to obscure and diminish our views of divine love and mercy. Ingratitude is as great a misery, as gratitude is true pleasure. We now receive thousands of mercies which we undervalue. But when I come to the state and work of perfect gratitude, I shall perfectly know all the mercies ever received by myself, by my neighbors and friends, by the church, and the world. Mercies remembered must be the matter of our everlasting thanks; and we cannot be perfectly thankful for them without a perfect knowledge of them. The worth of Christ and all his grace of the gospel, and of all divine ordinances and church privileges, of our books and our friends, our health, and all the conveniences of our lives, will be better understood in heaven than the most holy and thankful Christian ever understood them here.

Then I will be *much better acquainted with myself*. I will know the nature of souls and the way of their operations, and how the Spirit of God works upon them, and how that Spirit is sent from Christ to work upon them. I will know what measure of grace I myself had, and how far I was mistaken concerning it. I will know more of the number and greatness of my sins, and of my obligation to pardoning and healing grace. Yes, I will know more of my body as the habitation of my soul, and how far it helped or hindered me, and what were all its diseases, and how wonderfully God supported, preserved, and often delivered me.

I will also *far better know my fellow-creatures*. The good and bad, the sincere and hypocrites, will be discerned there. Actions that here were thought honorable, will then be found to be odious and unjust; and wickedness will no longer be flattered or extenuated. Many a good and holy work which was reproached as criminal, will there be justified, honored, and rewarded.

Once more, *I will better know what I was delivered from here, what enemies, sins, and dangers*; what stratagems of Satan and his instruments God defeated; how many snares I escaped; and how great is my deliverance by Christ from the wrath to come.

All this knowledge will thus be advanced to my glorified soul, beyond my present conceptions; and isn't it therefore far better to be with Christ?

4. It is far better for me to be with Christ, for the sake of *having my will perfected*. The will is to the soul what the heart is to the body. My greatest evil is there, and my greatest good will be there. Satan did most against it, and God will do most for it. When I am with Christ my will no longer will be tied to a body which is now the grand snare and enemy of my soul, by drawing my love and care, my fears and sorrows, to itself, and turning them from my highest interest. There my will shall not be tempted by a world of inferior good; nor shall food and sleep, possessions and friends, be my snares and dangers; nor shall the mercies of God be the tempter's instruments; <sup>Rom 6.1</sup> nor shall I have the flatteries or frowns of tyrants; nor will bad company infect or divert me; nor the errors of good men seduce me, nor the reputation of the wise and learned draw me to imitate them in any sin. There will be none of Satan's solicitations to pervert my will.

My will shall be better there than here, as it shall have nothing in it displeasing to God — no sinful inclination, no striving against God's Spirit, no grudging at any word or work of God, nor any principle of enmity or rebellion left. There it shall have no inclination to injure my neighbor, or to do anything against the common good. And there it shall have nothing in it opposite to itself: no more "law of my members warring against the law of my mind;" <sup>Rom 7.23</sup> no more contrariety between sense and reason; but all will be unity and peace within.

There Christ will have perfectly sanctified my will, and made it conformable to his own, and to his Father's will. This is at least his meaning when he prays, "that all his disciples may be one; as You, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us — that they may



be one, even as we are one.” <sup>Joh 17.21-22</sup> I shall love and will the same things that God loves and wills. And how can the will of man have greater honor? Assimilation to an earthly king is honorable, and much more to angels; but most of all, *to be like God*. Indeed, here the divine image in us is, in its degrees, a conformity to the will of God. But alas, how many thousand wishes and desires we have had which are *against* the will of God! We shall have the full impression of God’s will in heaven, as face answers face in a mirror, or the wax to the seal, or the finger of the clock to the motion within, or as the echo to the voice. I shall desire and never be disappointed. I shall have as much love and joy as I wish. Before I desire anything, I shall know whether it is God’s will or not, and therefore I shall never wish anything that shall not be accomplished. Indeed, my will shall be my enjoyment; for it shall not be the desire of what I want, but a contentment in what I possess. I shall want nothing. I shall thirst no more.

The will itself is rightly called *love*. My will shall be full of perfect joy, when enjoying love and pleasure will be my will. Thus I shall have a spring of living waters within myself. My will shall be confirmed and fixed in this conformity to the will of God. Now, both understanding and will are so lamentably mutable, that (further than God promises to uphold us) we do not know one day, what we shall think, judge, or will the next. But when love becomes our fixed nature, we shall be no wearier of loving, than the sun wearies of shining. God himself will be the full and everlasting object of my love. Perfect joyful complacency in God is the heaven which I desire and hope for. In God there is all that love can desire for its full everlasting feast. The nature of man’s will is to love good *as* good. God, who is infinitely good in himself, will be that most suitable good to me. He has all in himself that I need or can desire. There is nothing for love to cling to, either above him, beyond him, or outside him. He is willing to be beloved by me. He doesn’t disdain my love. He might have refused such affections as have so often embraced vanity and filth. But he commands my love, and makes it my greatest duty. He invites and entreats me, as if he gained by my happiness. He seeks me to seek him, and is both the first and most earnest suitor. He that so valued my cold imperfect love to him on earth, will not reject my perfect love in heaven. And he is *near* to me — not a distant God out of my reach, nor unsuitable to my love. Blind unbelievers may dream that he is far off; but even now he is as near to us as we are to ourselves. When he would sanctify us to love him, he brings us near to himself in Christ. *Here* we see him in his works and word; and *there* we shall see him in all the perfect glory of his works, and shall delightfully love that glorious perfection of the universe, even the image of God in all the world. I shall especially love the holy society, the triumphant universal church, consisting of Christ, angels, and saints. God himself loves them more than his inferior works; and *my* love, according to its measure, will imitate *his*.

Think here, my soul, how sweet your condition will be, to love the Lord Jesus, your glorified Head, with perfect love; when the glory of God which shines in him, will feast your love with full and everlasting pleasure! The highest created perfection of power, wisdom, and goodness, refulgent in him, will not permit your love to cease or abate its fervor. When you see in the glorified church, the precious fruits of Christ’s redeeming grace and love; and when you see yourself possessed of perfect happiness by his love to you, and remember what he did *for* you and *in* you here on earth — how he ‘called you with a holy calling;’ <sup>2Tim 1.9</sup> how he ‘washed you in his blood from all your sins;’ <sup>Rev 1.5</sup> how he kindled in you desires for glory; how he renewed your nature; how he instructed, guided, and preserved you from sins, enemies, and sufferings — all this will constrain you everlastingly to love him.

Think also, O my soul, how delightful it will be to love those angels who most fervently love the Lord. They will be lovely to you, as they have loved you, and more as they have been lovers of the church and of mankind; but *far* more as they are so many refulgent stars which continually move and shine and burn in perfect love to their Creator. O blessed difference

between that amiable society and this dark, distracted, wicked world. There I shall see or hear no evil; no mixture of folly or pollution; no false doctrine; no bad example; no favoring wickedness; no accusing goodness nor hurtful violence; but holy, powerful, active love will be all, and do all, as their very nature, life, and work. And isn't a day with them better than a thousand here? And with holy angels I will also love holy souls that are made like them, and joined with them in the same society. All their infirmities are put off there, and they are also spirits made up of holy life and light and love. When I think with what fervent love to God, to Jesus Christ, and to one another, they will be perfectly united there, then grieve and blush, O my soul, that they should be so disaffected and divided here. The imperfect image of God upon them is amiable, but through their remaining pride, error, and uncharitableness, it is hard to live with some of them in peace. O how delightful will be that communion of saints, where perfect love shall make them one. Do not forget, my soul, how sweet God has made the course of my pilgrimage by the fragrance and usefulness of his servants' graces. How sweet my bosom-friends have been; how sweet the neighborhood of the godly; how sweet their holy assemblies, their writings, conference, and prayers. What then will it be to live in perfect love with perfect saints in heaven forever, and with them to perfectly love the God of love?

As the act and object of love will constitute my future felicity, I will not be the fountain of my own delights; rather, my receiving from the love of God and his creatures will be sweeter to me than my own activity. All love is communicative, but none in compared with God's. Whatever good is done in the world, it is done by love. Therefore parents care and provide for their children. Therefore my house and table are not neglected, nor my books and learning forgotten, nor my friends despised, nor my life itself thrown away. If a man does not love his country, posterity, and the common good, he will be like a drone in the hive. And if created love is so necessary, so active and communicative, then much more will be the infinite love of the Creator. His love is now the life of nature in the living, the life of holiness in the saints, and the life of glory in those who are glorified. In this love, I and all the saints shall dwell for evermore. And if I dwell in love, and love in me, then surely I shall "ever drink of the rivers of pleasure." <sup>Psa 36.8</sup> Had I a great, wise, and good friend that did for me the hundredth part of what God does, how dearly I would love him.

Think then, think believingly, seriously, constantly, my soul, what a life you shall live forever in the presence and bosom of infinite, eternal Love. He now shines on me by the sun, and on my soul by the Sun of righteousness; yet it is through the crevices of my darksome habitation. But *then* he will shine on me and in me openly, and with the fullest streams and beams of love. God is the same God in heaven as on earth; but I shall not be the same man. Here the windows of my soul are not open to his light; sin has raised clouds, and consequently storms, against my comforts. The entrances to my soul by the straits of flesh and sense are narrow, and they are made narrower by sin than they were by nature. Alas, how often Love would have spoken comfortably to me, and I was not at home to be spoken with, but abroad among a world of vanities; or was not at leisure; or was asleep and not willing to be awakened. How often Love would have come in and dwelt with me, and I have unkindly shut him out. How often he would have freely entertained me in secret, but I had some trifling company or business that I was loath to leave. When his table has been spread for me, and Christ, grace, and glory were offered to me, how my appetite has been gone, or dull. *He would have been all to me, if I had been all for him.* But in heaven I shall have none of those obstructions. All old unkindness and ingratitude will be forgiven. I shall then be wholly separated from the vanity which here deceived me. I shall joyfully behold the open face and attend the charming voice of glorifying Love, and delightfully relish his celestial provisions.

No disease will corrupt my appetite. No sluggishness will renew my guilty neglects. “The love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit” <sup>2Cor 13.14</sup> will triumph over all my folly, deadness, and disaffection; and my God-displeasing and self-undoing averseness and enmity will be gone for ever. Study this heavenly work of love, my soul. These are not dead or barren studies. It is only love that can relish love, and understand it. Here the will has its taste. What can poor carnal worldlings know of glorious love, who study it without love? What sounding brass or tinkling cymbals are those who preach of God and Christ and heavenly glory, without love. But gazing on the face of love in Christ, tasting love’s gifts, contemplating its glorious reign, is the way to kindle the sacred fire in you. The magnifying glass must be turned directly to the sun in order for it to set anything on fire. A holy love like that in heaven must be studiously fetched from heaven, and be kindled by the foresight of what is there, and *what we shall be* there forever. Faith must ascend and look within the veil. You, my soul, must not live as a stranger to your home and hopes, to your God and Saviour. The fire that must warm you is in heaven, and you must come near it and open yourself to its influence, if you would feel its powerful efficacy. It is night and winter with carnal minds, when it is day and summer with those who set their faces heavenward.

But in heaven, God will make use of second causes even in communicating his love and glory. There the Lord Jesus Christ will not only be the object of our delightful love, but his love to us will be as the vital heat and motion of the heart to all the members, the root of our life and joy. Did his tears for a dead Lazarus make men say, “Behold how he loved him?” <sup>Joh 11.36</sup> What then will the reviving beams of heavenly life make us say of that love which fills us with the pleasures of his presence, and turns our souls into joy itself? Believe, my soul, your Saviour’s love, that you may have a foretaste of it, and be fit for complete enjoyment. Let your believing be so much of your daily work, that you may say, ‘He dwells in your heart by faith,’ <sup>Eph 3.17</sup> and ‘lives in you,’ <sup>Rom 8.11</sup> and that your life in the flesh is not a fleshly life, but you live ‘by the faith of the Son of God who loved you, and gave himself for you.’ <sup>Gal 2.20</sup> Look at the sun, and think to yourself how its motion, light, and heat are communicated to millions of creatures all over the earth and in the seas. What if all these beams of light and heat were proportionate beams of perfect knowledge, love, and joy? If all the creatures under the sun received from it as much wisdom, love, and joy as they have of light, heat, and motion, what a blessed world it would be, even a heaven on earth. Thus the Sun of glory will send forth life, light, and joyful love on all the heavenly inhabitants. Therefore begin now to live upon the influence of his grace, that you may have his name and mark. He has not bid me to seek his grace in vain.

He does more than bid me to seek and ask. He teaches me to pray. He makes my prayers, and writes them on my heart. He gives me desires, and he loves to have me importunate with him, and is displeased with me that I will ask and have no more. How then does my soul come to be yet so fond of this wretched flesh and world, and so backward to go home and dwell with Christ? Alas, a taste of heaven on earth is too precious to be thrown away on those who have long grieved and quenched the Spirit, and who are not, by diligent and patient seeking, prepared to receive it. My conscience remembers the follies of my youth, and many a later odious sin. It tells me that if heaven were quite hidden from my sight, and I never had a glimpse of the face of glorious eternal Love, it would be just. I look upward from day to day, and to better know my God and my home, I cry to him daily,

“My God, my hopes are better than all the possessions of this world, far better than all the pleasures of sin. Your gracious looks have often revived me, and your mercies have been immeasurable to my soul and body. But O, how far short I am of what, even forty years ago, I hoped to have attained sooner. Where is ‘the peace that passes all understanding, which should keep my heart and mind through Christ Jesus?’ <sup>Phi 4.7</sup> Where is the seeing, longing,

and rejoicing faith? Where is that pleasant familiarity with Christ in heaven, that would make a thought of them sweeter than the thoughts of friends, health, or all the prosperity and pleasure of this world? Do those who 'dwell in God, and God in them,' <sup>Rev 21.3</sup> and have their 'hearts and conversations in heaven,' <sup>Phi 3.20</sup> attain no clearer or more satisfactory perceptions of that blessed state than I have yet attained? Is there no livelier sense of future joys? No sweeter foretaste, nor fuller silencing of doubts and fears?

"Alas, how many of your servants are less afraid to go to prison than to their God, and would rather be banished to a land of strangers than sent to heaven. Must I, who am called your child, and an heir of heaven, and a co-heir with Christ, have no more acquaintance with my glorified Lord, and no more love to You, who are my portion, before I go from here? Shall I have no more of the heavenly life and light and love? Alas, I have scarcely enough in my meditations, or prayers, or sermons, to call them heavenly. And must I go from here, so like a stranger to my home? Will you take strangers into heaven, and know them there as yours, who know you no better here? O my God, grant a sinner yet more of the Spirit of your Son, who came to earth to call up earthly minds to God, and to open heaven to all believers. What do I beg so frequently, so earnestly for the sake of my Redeemer, as the Spirit of life and consolation, to show me the reconciled face of God, and unite all my affections to my glorified Head, and draw up this dark, drowsy soul to love, and to long to be with you?"

Alas, though those are my daily groans, how little do I ascend. I dare not blame the God of love, nor my blessed Saviour, nor the Sanctifier and Comforter of souls. Undoubtedly the cause is my sinful resistance to the Spirit, my unthankful neglects of grace and glory. But mercy can forgive; grace can overcome; and may I not hope for such a victory before I die? Lord, I will lie at your doors, and pour out my complaints before you. You told us how kindly the dogs licked the sores of a Lazarus who lay at a rich man's gate. You commended the good Samaritan for taking care of a wounded man. You say, 'Blessed are the merciful;' <sup>Mat 5.7</sup> You command us, 'Be merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful.' <sup>Luk 6.36</sup> And shall I wait at your doors in vain? Give me the wedding-garment, without which I will but dishonor your feast. You have commanded me to rejoice, and how gladly would I obey you in this. O that I had more faithfully obeyed You in ruling my senses, my thoughts, my tongue, and in the diligent improvement of all my talents; then I might more easily have rejoiced. Lord, help my love and joy. How can I rejoice in death and darkness? I hoped I was long since translated from the kingdom of darkness, and delivered from the power of the prince of darkness, and brought into that light which is the entrance of the inheritance of saints; and yet, alas, darkness is still my misery. There is light round about me in your word and works, but darkness is *within* me. And if my eye is dark, the sun will be no sun to me. What is my unbelief but the darkness of my soul? Lord Jesus, scatter all these mists. O you Sun of righteousness, make your way into this benighted mind. O send your advocate to silence every temptation against your truth and you, to prosecute your cause against your enemies and mine, and to witness my sonship and salvation. I know, my Lord, heaven is not far from me, no, not a day or an hour's journey to a separated soul. How quick is the communion of my eyes with the distant sun. And could you not show me heaven in a moment? Isn't faith a seeing grace? If animated by you, it can see the invisible God in the unseen world, the 'New Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect.' <sup>Heb 12.22</sup> Without you my soul can do nothing, and is nothing. Forgive all my sins, and remove this film that sin has gathered, and my enlightened soul will see your glory. I know this veil of flesh must also be torn before I shall see you with open face, and know my fellow-citizens above, as I am known. It is not heaven on earth I am asking for, but that I may see it from Mount Nebo, and have the pledge and the firstfruits; and that my faith and hope may kindle love and desire, and make me run my race

with patience, and live and die in the joy which becomes an heir of heaven. But if my faith on earth must not increase, let it make me all the wearier of this dungeon, and more fervently wish for the day when all my desires shall be satisfied, and my soul be filled with your light and love.

And in subordination to Christ, I shall also be a receiver in heaven from angels and saints. If angels are greatly useful to me here, much more will they be useful there, where I shall be more capable of receiving from them. It will be no more diminution to the honor of Christ to make use of my fellow-creatures to my joy there, than it was here. How gloriously God will shine in the glory of the blessed; how delightful it will be to see their perfection in wisdom, holiness, and love. They will love incomparably better than our dearest friends on earth can, who can only pity us in our pains, and go weeping with our corpses to the grave. But the friends above will joyfully convoy or welcome our souls to their triumphant society. What a glorious state it will be when all the love of angels and saints in full perfection shall be so united as to make one love, to one God, and to each other, as made one in Christ. We little know how great a mercy it is here, to be commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves, and much more to be effectually taught by God to love one another. If we all lived in such unfeigned love, earth would resemble heaven.

“Go then, go *willingly* my soul; love joins with light to draw up your desires. Are you a lover of wisdom, holiness, and love, and would you not be united to the wise and holy who are made up of love? Are you a hater of discords and divisions on earth, and would you not be where all the just are one? Isn't your body, while kept together by a uniting soul, in a better state than when it is to be crumbled into lifeless dust? And doesn't death creep on you by a gradual dissolution? Away then from this incoherent state. The farther from the centre, the farther from unity. It is now your weakness and imperfection which makes you so desirous that your house, your land, your clothes, your books, yes, your knowledge and grace, should be yours, and yours only. How much more excellent if you could say that all these, like the light of the sun, are mine, and everyone's as well as mine. In heaven your knowledge, your glory, and felicity shall be yours, and others' as well as yours. The knowledge, goodness, and glory of all that perfect society shall be yours as far as your capacity extends. Then hasten upward, my soul, with your most fervent desires, and breathe after that state with your strangest hopes, where you shall not be rich and see your neighbors poor, nor be poor while they are rich; nor be well while they are sick, nor sick while they are well.”

Communion, as it constitutes the very being of the city of God, will be part of everyone's felicity, and none will have less for the participation of the rest. This celestial communion of saints in one holy church, above what is attainable here, is now an article of our belief; but *believing* will soon end in *seeing* and *enjoying*.

5. It is also far better for me to be with Christ, that I may have a perfect activity in doing good. There are good works in heaven, and far more and better than on earth. There will be more life and power for action; more love to God and one another to excite action; more likeness to God and Christ in *doing* good, as well as *being* good; more union with the beneficent Jesus to make us also beneficent; and more communion by each contributing to the welfare of the whole, and sharing in their common returns to God. What the heavenly works are, we must perfectly know when we come there. “We shall join with the whole society,” as the Scriptures particularly describe, “in giving thanks and praise to God and our Redeemer.” All passions earnestly desire to be freely exercised, especially our holy affections of love, joy, and admiration of Almighty God. In expressing such affections, we naturally desire communion with many. I think, when we are singing the praises of God in great assemblies, with joyful

and fervent spirits, I have the liveliest foretaste of heaven on earth, and could almost wish that our voices were loud enough to reach through all the world, and to heaven itself. Nor could I ever be offended with the sober and seasonable use of instrumental music to help to tune my soul in so holy a work. Nothing comforts me more in my greatest sufferings, nor seems more fitting for me while I wait for death, than singing psalms of praise to God; nor is there any exercise in which I would rather end my life. Should I not then willingly go to the heavenly choir, where God is praised with perfect love and joy and harmony? If I had more of a praising frame of soul, I would long more for that life of praise. I never find myself more willing to be there than when I most joyfully speak or sing the praises of God. Though the “dead do not praise God in the grave, nor dust celebrate him,” <sup>Psa 115.17</sup> yet living souls in heaven do it joyfully, while their fleshly clothing turns to dust.

“Lord, tune my soul to your praises now, so that sweet experience may make me long to be where I shall do it better. Wherever there is any excellent music, I see men naturally flock to it and hear it with delight. Surely, if I had once heard the heavenly choir, I would echo to their holy songs, and think it the truest blessedness to bear my part. My God, it is the inward melody of your Spirit, and my own conscience, that must tune me for the heavenly melody. O speak your love first to my heart, and then I will joyfully speak it to others, and ardently seek after communion better than that of sinful mortals. Though my sins make a sad discord in my present songs, I hope my sighs and tears for sin have had the honor of your acceptance, who does not despise a contrite soul. But if your Spirit will sing and speak within me, and help me against the jarring murmur of my unbelieving heart and pained flesh, I shall then offer you what is more suitable to your love and grace. I confess, Lord, that daily tears and sighs are not unsuitable to the eyes and voice of so great a sinner, now under your correcting rod. But ‘he that offers praise glorifies you;’ <sup>Psa 50.23</sup> and isn’t this the ‘spiritual sacrifice, acceptable through Christ,’ <sup>Rom 12.1</sup> for which we are made priests to God? I do not refuse, Lord, to lie in tears and groans when you require it, nor do you reject those tears and groans. But O, give me better, that I may have better of your own to offer you, and so prepare me for the *far* better which I shall find with Christ.”

God probably makes glorified spirits the agents of his beneficence to inferior creatures. Where he bestows on any the noblest endowments, we see he makes most use of them for the benefit of others. Christ tells us we shall be like, or equal to the angels, who are evidently the ministers of God for the good of his people in this world. The apostle says, “the saints shall judge the world” and “angels.” <sup>1Cor 6.2-3</sup> He intimates that devils and damned spirits shall be subjected to the saints. But if there were no more for us to do in heaven, than with perfect knowledge, love, and joy, to hold communion with God and all the heavenly society, it is enough to excite, in a considerate soul, the most fervent desires to be at home with God.

**CHAPTER 5.**  
**THE AUTHOR YEARNs AFTER A WILLINGNESS**  
**TO DEPART AND TO BE WITH CHRIST.**

1. Lamenting the inefficacy of his convictions, he begs divine teaching; argues against his doubts and fears; desires a heavenly temper; and then excites his faith, viewing its support from reason, from experience, and pleading the promises. 2. He next excites his hope; views its preparations, and pleads it in prayer. 3. He also excites his love; considers its excellences; prays for its increase; contemplates the perfection of heavenly love; is jealous of his own love; enumerates the evidences of God's love; and prays for its full discovery.

I am convinced that it is far better to depart and to be with Christ, than to be here. But this conviction alone will not excite such desires in my soul. They are opposed by a natural aversion to death, which sin has greatly increased; and by the remains of unbelief, which avails itself of our darkness in the flesh, and our excessive familiarity with this visible world; and also by the want of a livelier foretaste of heaven. What must be done to overcome this opposition? Is there no remedy? Yes, there is a divine teaching by which we must learn "to so number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Psa 90.12 When we have read and heard, spoken and written the soundest truth and strongest arguments, we still know as if we didn't know, and believe as if we didn't believe, unless God powerfully impresses the same things on our minds, and awakens our souls to *feel* what we *know*. Since we fell from God, the communion between our senses and understanding, and also between our understanding and our will and affections, is violated, and we are divided in ourselves by this schism in our faculties. All men may easily know that there is an almighty, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and perfectly holy and good God, the maker, preserver, and governor of all, who deserves our whole trust, love, and obedience — but how *little* of this knowledge is to be perceived in men's hearts or lives. All men know that the world is vanity, that man must die, that riches cannot then profit, that time is precious, and that we have but little time to prepare for eternity — but how *little* do men seem to have of the real knowledge of these plain truths. Indeed, when God comes in with his powerful awakening light and love, *then* those things appear as different as if we were beginning to know them. All my best reasons for our immortality are but like the new-formed body of Adam before "God breathed into him the breath of life;" Gen 2.7 and He alone can make them living reasons. I must therefore still look up to the Father of lights, and for his light and love I must still wait. I must learn both as a student and a beggar. When I have thought and thought a thousand times, I must beg your blessing, Lord, upon my thoughts. The eye of my understanding will be useless or vexatious to me without your illuminating beams. O shine the soul of your servant into a clearer knowledge of yourself and kingdom, and love him into more divine and heavenly love, and he will then willingly come to You.

Why should I, by the fears of death, strive against the common course of nature, and against my only hopes of happiness? Isn't it "appointed unto men once to die?" Heb 9.27 Would I have God make sinful man immortal upon earth? When we are sinless, we shall be immortal. The love of life was given to teach me to preserve it with care and use it well, and not to torment myself with the continual foresight of death. If it is the misery *after* death that is feared, what have I to do but to receive the free reconciling grace which is offered to me from heaven, to save me from such misery; and to devote myself totally to Him who has promised, "Whoever comes to Me, I will in no way cast out?" Joh 6.37 Had I studied my duty, and remembered that I am not my own, and that my times are in God's hands, I would have been quiet from these fruitless fears. Had my resignation and devotedness to God been more absolute, my trust in

him would have been easier. "But, Lord, you know that I would gladly be yours, and wholly yours, and that I desire to live to you: therefore let me wholly trust you with my soul."

Why should I have any remaining doubt about the future state of pious separated spirits? My Saviour has entered into the holiest, and has assured me that "there are many mansions in his Father's house," <sup>Joh 14.2</sup> and that when we are "absent from the body," we shall be "present with the Lord." <sup>1Cor 5.3</sup> Who can think that all holy souls who have gone from here, from the beginning of the world, have been deceived in their faith and hope; and that all those whose hope was only in this life, <sup>1Cor 15.19</sup> have been in the right? Shall I not abhor every suggestion that contains such absurdities? It is a wonder that Satan can keep up so much unbelief in the world, while he must make men fools in order to make them unbelievers and ungodly!

That my soul has no more lively foretastes of heaven, arises from those many willful sins by which I have quenched the Spirit, and from the soul's imprisonment in the flesh. This, O *this* is the misery and burden of my soul. Though I can say, I love God's truth and grace, his work and servants, and yet have no more ardent and delightful love of heaven, where his loveliness will be more fully opened to my soul, is my sin, calamity, and shame. If I did not see that it is so with other servants of Christ, as well as myself, I would doubt whether affections so disproportionate to my profession did not imply an unsound faith. It is strange that one who expects quickly to see the glorious world, and enter the holy celestial society, should not be more joyfully affected with such hopes; and strange that I should think so much of the pain and perishing of the flesh, though it is the common way to such an end. O hateful sin that has so darkened and corrupted souls as to indispose them for their only expected happiness. What did man do, when he forsook the love and obedience of his God? How just it is that this flesh should be our prison, which we would make our home! How mournful, that in this world there is no more grace and holiness, knowledge of God and communion with him; that so few are saints, and those few are so very imperfect; that while the sun shines on all the earth, the Sun of righteousness shines on so small a part of it! He that made us capable of holy and heavenly affections, did not give us that capacity in vain. Yet, alas, how little of God and glory enters into the hearts of men! When recovering light shines upon us, how unthankfully we entertain it. We cannot have the conduct and comfort of it while we shut our eyes and turn away. And though God give to the best not so much of it as they desire, it is an unspeakable mercy that in this darksome world, we may but hear of a better world, and may seek it in hope. We must not grudge in our prison to be denied such a presence of our king, and such pleasures of the kingdom, as innocent and free subjects have. Hope of pardon, and of a speedy deliverance, are great mercies to malefactors. And if my want of the knowledge and love of God, and of joyful communion with the heavenly society, is my prison, and like the suburbs of hell, shouldn't it make me long for the day of my redemption, and the glorious liberty of the sons of God? My sincere desires of deliverance, and of holiness and perfection, are my evidences that I shall obtain them. As the *will* is the sinner, so the obstinate continuance of a *will to sin*, is the cause of continued sin. So far as God makes us *willing* to be delivered from sin, that far we *are* delivered; and our imperfect deliverance is the way to more. If pains make me groan for ease, and sickness for health, why shouldn't my remains of ignorance, unbelief, and alienation from God, excite my desire for the day of my salvation? As it is the nature of my sin to draw down my heart from God and glory, so it is the nature of my faith, hope, and love, to raise my heart toward heavenly perfection — not to desire *death*, but that which is beyond it. And have I been so many years in the school of Christ, learning both how to live and die, praying for this grace and exercising it against this sinful flesh; and after all that, shall I not find flesh more powerful to draw me downward, than faith, hope, and love are to carry my desires up to God?



“O God, forbid. O you who freely gave me your *grace*, maintain it to the last against its enemies, and make it finally victorious. It came from you; it has been preserved by you; it is on your side, and wholly for you; without it I would have lived like a beast, and would die more miserably than a beast; it is your image that you love; it is a divine nature and a heavenly beam. What will a soul be without it, but a dungeon of darkness, and dead to holiness and heaven? Without it, who shall plead your cause against the devil, world, and flesh? Without your glory, earth is but earth; and without your grace, earth would be a hell. O rather deny me the light of the sun than the light of your countenance. I would have been less miserable without life or being, than without your grace. Without your and my Saviour's help, I can do nothing. I could not pray or learn without you; I never could conquer a temptation without you. And can I die, or be prepared to die, without you? I shall but say, as Thomas said to Christ, ‘I do not know where my soul is going, and how can I know the way?’ <sup>Joh 6.42</sup> My Lord having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end. He even commended and rewarded those who had continued with him in his temptations. You love fidelity and perseverance in your servants; and will you forsake a sinner in his extremity, who consents to your covenant, and would not forsake you? My God, I have often sinned against you; but you know I would gladly be yours. I can say with Paul, you are the ‘God whose I am, and whom I serve;’ <sup>Act 27.23</sup> and O that I could serve you better. To serve you is but to receive your grace, and to use it for my own and others' good, and thereby please and glorify You.

“I have nothing to do in this world but to seek and serve you. I have nothing to do with my tongue but to speak to you, and for you; and with my pen, but to publish your glory and your will. What have I to do with all my reputation and influence over others, but to increase your church, and propagate your holy truth and service? What have I to do with my remaining time, even these last and languishing hours, but to look up to You, and wait for your grace and your salvation? O pardon all my carnal thoughts, all my unthankful treatment of your grace and love, and all my willful sins against your truth and you. Under the terrors of the law you even proclaimed yourself ‘the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.’ <sup>Exo 34.6-7</sup> And isn't ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ’ revealed in the gospel for our more abundant faith and consolation? My God, I know I can never be sufficiently confident of your all-sufficient power, wisdom, and goodness. When I have said, ‘Will the Lord cast off forever; and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Does his promise fail forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious; has he in anger shut up his tender mercies?’ <sup>Psa 77.7-9</sup> Conscience has replied, *This is my infirmity*; I never lacked comfort for lack of mercy in you, but for lack of faith and holiness in myself. And don't You have mercy to also *give* me that faith and holiness? My God, all is of you, and through you, and to you; and when I have the felicity, the glory of all will be forever yours. None who trust in your nature and promise shall be ashamed. If I can live and die trusting in you, surely I shall not be confounded.”

Why then should it seem a difficult question, how my soul may willingly leave this world and go to Christ in peace? The same grace which regenerated me, must bring me to my desired end. “Believe and trust your Father, your Saviour, and your Comforter. Hope, for the joyful entertainments of the promised blessedness; and long by love, for nearer divine union and communion. Thus, O my soul, may you depart in peace.”

1. *Believe and trust* the promise of God. How sure it is, and how suitable to his love, to the nature of our souls, and to the operations of every grace. Why, O my soul, are you so vainly solicitous to have clear, distinct conceptions of the celestial world? When you are possessed

of a better state, you shall know it as a possessor ought to; for such a knowledge as you look for is *part* of that possession. Your Saviour and his glorified saints are possessors. His knowledge must now be your chief satisfaction. Do not seek vainly to usurp his prerogative. Would you be a God and Saviour to yourself? Consider how much of the fall there is in this selfish desire to be like God, in knowing what does not belong to you to know. You know that there undoubtedly is a God of infinite perfection, "and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him." <sup>Heb 11.6</sup> Labor more to know your duty to this God, and to absolutely trust him as to the particulars of your reward. You trusted your parents to provide you food and raiment, and you implicitly obeyed them. You trusted physicians to give you medicines without inquiring after every ingredient. If a pilot undertakes to carry you to the Indies, you can trust his conduct without knowing either the ship or how to govern it, or the way, or the place to which you are conveyed. And must your God and Saviour not be trusted to bring you safely to heaven unless He satisfies all your inquiries? The command to be "careful for nothing," <sup>Phi 4.6</sup> and to "cast all your care on God, who cares for you," <sup>1Pet 5.7</sup> obliges you in all things that are *God's part*. And to dispose of a departing soul is *God's part*. O how much evil there is in this distrusting, self-providing care. Departing soul, do not be "cast down," nor by unbelief be "disquieted within me. Trust in God," for soon experience shall teach you to "praise him," who is "the health of my countenance, and my God." <sup>Psa 42.11</sup>

How clearly reason commands me to trust Him, to absolutely and implicitly trust Him, and to *distrust* myself. He is essential, infinite perfection, wisdom, power, and love. There is nothing to be trusted in any creature except as God is working in it, or by it. I am altogether his own, by right, by devotion, and by consent. He is the giver of all good to every creature, as freely as the sun gives its light; and shall we not trust the sun to shine? He is my Father, and has taken me into his family; and shall I not trust my heavenly Father? He has given me his Son, as the greatest pledge of his love; and "shall he not with him also freely give me all things?" <sup>Rom 8.32</sup> His Son purposely came to reveal his Father's unspeakable love; and shall I not trust him who has proclaimed his love by such a messenger from heaven? He has given me the Spirit of his Son, even the Spirit of adoption, the witness, pledge, and earnest of heaven, the seal of God upon me, "holiness to the Lord;" and shall I not believe his love and trust him? He has made me a member of his Son, and will he not take care of me, and is Christ not to be trusted with his members? I am his interest, and the interest of his Son, freely beloved and dearly bought; and may I not trust him with his treasure? He has made me the care of angels, who rejoiced at my repentance; and shall they lose their joy or ministration? He is in covenant with me, and has "given me many great and precious promises;" and can he be unfaithful? <sup>2Pet 1.4</sup> My Saviour is the forerunner, who has entered into the holiest, and is there interceding for me, <sup>Heb 6.19-20</sup> having first conquered death to assure us of a future life, and ascended into heaven, to show us where we must ascend to, saying to his brethren, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God;" <sup>Joh 20.17</sup> and shall I not follow him through death, and trust such a guide and captain of my salvation? He is there to "prepare a place for me, and will receive me to himself;" <sup>Joh 14.3</sup> and may I not confidently expect it? He told a malefactor on the cross, "Today you shall be with me in paradise," <sup>Luk 23.43</sup> to show believing sinners what they may expect. His apostles and other saints have served him on earth with all these expectations. "The spirits of just men made perfect" <sup>Heb 12.22</sup> are now possessing what I hope for, and I am a "follower of those who through faith and patience inherit the promised" felicity; <sup>Heb 6.12</sup> and may I not trust him to save me, who has already saved millions? I must be at the divine disposal, whether I will it or not; and however I vex my soul with fears and cares and sorrows, I shall never prevail against the will of God, which is the only rest of souls. Our own wills have undone us, and are our disease, our prison, and

our death, till they are brought over to the will of God; and shall I die, distrustfully striving against his will, and preferring my own before it?

What abundant experience have I had of God's fidelity and love; and after all this, shall I not trust him? His undeserved mercy gave me being, chose my parents, gave them affectionate desires for my real good, taught them to instruct me early in his word, and to educate me in His fear; made my habitation and companions suitable, endowed me with a teachable disposition, put excellent books into my hands, and placed me under wise and faithful schoolmasters and ministers. His mercy fixed me in the best of lands, and in the best age that land had seen. His mercy early destroyed in me all great expectations from the world, taught me to bear the yoke from my youth, caused me to groan under my infirmities rather than struggle with powerful lusts, and chastened me at times, but did not give me over to death. Ever since I was nineteen, great mercy has trained me up in the school of affliction, to keep my sluggish soul awake in constant expectation of my change, to kill my proud and worldly thoughts, and to direct all my studies to the most necessary things. How a life of constant but gentle chastisement has urged me to "make my calling and election sure," <sup>2Pet 1.10</sup> and to prepare my accounts, as one who must quickly give them up to God. The face of death, and nearness of eternity, convinced me what books to read, what studies to prosecute, and what companions to choose. It drove me early into the vineyard of the Lord, and taught me to *preach as a dying man to dying men*. It was divine love and mercy which made sacred truth so pleasant to me, that my life, under all my infirmities, has been almost a constant recreation. How far beyond my expectation has a merciful God encouraged me in his sacred work, choosing every place of my ministry and abode to this day, without my own seeking, and never sending me to labor in vain. How many have gone to heaven, and how many are on the way, through a divine blessing on the word which I delivered in weakness.

Many good Christians are glad of now and then an hour to meditate on God's word, and they refresh themselves in his holy worship. But God has allowed and called me to make it the constant business of my life. In my library I have profitably and pleasantly dwelt among the shining lights with which the learned, wise, and holy men of all ages have illuminated the world. How many comfortable hours I have had in the society of living saints, and in the love of faithful friends. How many joyful days in solemn worshipping assemblies where the Spirit of Christ has been manifestly present, both with ministers and people. How unworthy was such a sinful worm as I, who never had any academic helps, nor much from the mouth of any teacher, that books should have become so great a blessing to me, and that God should induce or constrain me, quite beyond my own intentions, to provide any such similar helps for others. How unworthy that God should use me above forty years in so comfortable a work as pleading and writing for love, peace, and concord, and with so much success. "What mercy I had amidst the calamities of a civil war, to live two years in safety at Coventry, a city of defence, and in the heart of the kingdom. When afterwards I saw the effects of human folly and fury, and of God's displeasure, in the ruin of towns and countries, and in the fields covered with carcasses of the slain, how mercifully I was preserved and brought home in peace. And Oh, how great was the mercy shown me in a peaceable, humble, unanimous people, so numerous, so exemplary, and who to this day maintain their integrity and concord, when for thirty-one years I have been forced to remain at a distance from them. What a mercy, when I might not speak by *voice* to any single congregation, to be enabled to speak by *writings* to many, and to have the plainest writings attended with success, and some of them sent to preach in foreign lands and languages. Though I have been sent to the common jail for my service and obedience to God, yet there he has kept me in peace, and soon delivered me.

And how often He has succored me when nature and art have failed. How he has cured my consumptive coughs, stopped my flowing blood, eased my pained limbs, and upheld an emaciated skeleton. I have had fifty years added to my days, though I did not expect to live one of them. And what strange deliverances have been wrought for me upon the importunate requests of many hundreds of my praying friends. How I have been kept in ordinary health and safety, when the raging pestilence came near my habitation and consumed a hundred thousand citizens.<sup>6</sup> And how my dwelling was preserved, when I saw London, the glory of the land, in flames. These and many more are my experiences of that wonderful mercy which has measured my pilgrimage, and filled up my days. Never did God break his promise with me. Never did he fail me or forsake me. And shall I now distrust him at last?

“To you, Lord, as to ‘a faithful Creator,’ I commit my soul.<sup>1Pet 4.19</sup> I know that you are ‘the faithful God, who keeps covenant and mercy with those who love you and keep your commandments.’<sup>Deu 7.9</sup> ‘You are faithful, who have called me to the fellowship of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.’<sup>1Cor 1.9</sup> Your faithfulness has saved me from temptation, and kept me from prevailing evil, and will ‘preserve my whole spirit and soul and body unto the coming of Christ.’<sup>1The 5.23</sup> It is in faithfulness that you have *afflicted* me; and shall I not trust you to *save* me? ‘It is your faithful saying, that your elect shall obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. For if we are dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him.’<sup>2Tim 2.11-12</sup>

“To you, my Saviour, I commit my soul; it is yours by redemption, yours by covenant; it is sealed by your Spirit, and you have promised not to lose it. You were ‘made like your brethren, that you might be a merciful and faithful High-priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for our sins.’<sup>Heb 2.17</sup> By your blood we have boldness to enter into the holiest, by a new and living way consecrated for us. Cause me to ‘draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.’<sup>Heb 10.20-22</sup> Your name is faithful and true. True and faithful are all your promises. You have promised rest to weary souls who come to you. I am weary of suffering, sin, and flesh — weary of my darkness, dullness, and distance. Where should I look for rest, but home to my heavenly Father and You? I am but a bruised reed, but you will not break me. I am but smoking flax, but you will not quench what your grace has kindled. You, in whose name the nations trust, ‘will bring forth judgment to victory.’<sup>Mat 12.20</sup> The Lord redeems the souls of his servants, and none of them who trust in him shall be desolate. I will wait on your name, for it is good: I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever. The Lord is good, a strong-hold in the day of trouble. He knows those who trust in him. Sinful fear brings a snare; but whoever puts his trust in the Lord shall be safe. ‘Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust.’<sup>Psa 40.4</sup> You are my hope, O Lord God; you are my trust from my youth. ‘By You I have been upheld from the womb: my praise shall be continually of you. Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails.’<sup>Psa 71.6,9</sup> ‘O God, you have taught me from my youth, and to this day I have declared your wondrous works.’<sup>Psa 71.17</sup> Now also, when I am old and gray-headed, O God, do not forsake me. My eyes are toward you, O God the Lord. My trust is in You; do not leave my soul destitute. ‘I would have fainted, unless I believed I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living,’<sup>Psa 27.13</sup> even where those who live shall die no more.”

The sun may cease to shine on man, and the earth to bear us; but God will never cease to be faithful to his promises. Blessed be the Lord, who has commanded me so safe and quieting a duty as to trust in him, and cast all my cares upon him who has promised to care for me.

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<sup>6</sup> The London Plague of 1665-1666 took over 100,000 lives in that city.

2. *Hope* also for the salvation of God. Hope is the ease, yes, the *life* of our hearts, which would otherwise break and even die within us. Despair is no small part of hell. God cherishes hope, as he is the lover of souls. Satan our enemy cherishes despair, when his more usual way of presumption fails. Hope anticipates salvation, as fear does evil. It is the hypocrite's hope that perishes; and all who hope for durable happiness on earth must be deceived. But 'happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, who keeps truth forever.' Psa 146.5-6 Woe to me, if in this life only I had hope. But the righteous has hope in his death. And hope does not make ashamed. Rom 5:5 Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. Jer 17:7 Lay hold then, O my soul, upon the hope set before you; it is your sure and steadfast anchor, Heb 6.18-19 without which you will be as a shipwrecked vessel. Your foundation is sure, even God himself. Our faith and hope are both in God. Christ dwells in our hearts by faith; in us He is the hope of glory. By this hope, better than the law of Moses could bring, we draw near to God. 'We hope for what we do not see, and wait for it with patience. We are saved by hope.' Rom 8.25,24 It is an *encouraging* grace; it excites our diligence and helps to full assurance unto the end. It is a *desiring* grace, and an earnest to obtain the glory hoped for. It is a *comforting* grace; for the God of hope fills us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost. Rom 15.13 Shake off despondency, O my soul, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Believe in hope, though dying flesh would tell you that it is against hope. Rom 4.18

What blessed preparations are made for our hope! God has confirmed it by two immutable things, his promise and his oath. "His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for us." 1Pet 1.3-4 Grace teaches us that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour." Tit 2.12-13 We are renewed by the Holy Ghost, and justified by grace, that we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Tit 3.7 The eyes of our understanding are enlightened, that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of this inheritance in the saints. Eph 1.18 The hope which is laid up for us in heaven has, through the gospel, brought life and immortality to light. 2Tim 1.10 Having hope towards God, we exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence, Act 24.16 and serve God day and night. For a helmet, we put on the hope of salvation. Death is not to us as it is to others who have no hope. Our Lord Jesus Christ and God, even our Father, has loved us, and has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, to comfort our hearts and establish us in every good word and work. 2The 2.17 We must hold fast the rejoicing of the hope, firm unto the end, and continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the gospel. Heb 3.6; Col 1.23

And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you. Uphold me according to your word, that I may live, and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Though our iniquities testify against us, yet, O Lord, the Hope of Israel, the Saviour of it in time of trouble, do not be as a stranger, do not leave us. We have been shown the praises of the Lord and his wonderful works, that we might set our hope in God. Remember the word to your servant, on which you caused me to hope: 'If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?' But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope. Let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. Psa 130.3-7 The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his mercy. Psa 147.11 Though my flesh and heart fail, God is the strength of my heart. The Lord is my portion, say my soul; therefore will I hope in him. Psa 73.26 The Lord is good to those

who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth, and keeps silence, and puts his mouth in the dust; if so, there may be hope. <sup>Lam 3.25-29</sup>

God need not flatter such worms as we, nor promise us what he never means to perform. He has laid the rudiments of our hope in a nature capable of desiring, seeking, and thinking of another life. He has called me by grace to actual desires and endeavors, and has granted some foretastes. I look for no heaven but the perfection of divine life, light, and love in endless glory with Christ and his saints; and this he has already begun in me. And shall I not boldly hope, when I have capacity, the promise, and the earnest and foretaste of it? Isn't it God himself who *caused* me to hope? Were not nature, promise, and grace from him? And can a soul miscarry and be deceived, who departs from here in a hope that is of God's own producing and encouraging?

“Lord, I have lived in hope, I have prayed, labored, suffered, and waited in hope, and by your grace, I will die in hope; and isn't this according to your word and will? And will you cast away a soul who hopes in you by your own command and operation?”

If wealth and honor and continuance on earth, or the favor of man, had been my reward and hope, my hope and I would have died together. If this were our best, how vain man would be. But the Lord lives, and my Redeemer is glorified, and intercedes for me: and the same Spirit is in heaven who is in my heart, just as the same sun is in the firmament and in my house. The promise is sure to all Christ's seed; for millions are now in heaven who once lived and died in hope. They were sinners once, as I now am; they had no other Saviour, Sanctifier, or promise than I now have. Confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, they desired a better country, that is, a heavenly country, where they now are. <sup>Heb 11.13,16</sup> And shall I not follow those in hope, who have sped so well? Then, O my soul, hope to the end. Hope in the Lord, from henceforth and forever. I will hope continually, and will yet praise him more and more. My mouth will show forth his righteousness and salvation. <sup>Psa 71.15</sup> The Lord is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also shall rest in hope. <sup>Psa 16.8-9</sup> God has shown me the path of life: in his presence is fulness of joy. At his right hand there are pleasures forevermore. <sup>Psa 16.11</sup>

3. What then remains, but that in faith and hope I *love* my God, my Saviour, my Comforter, the glorious society, and my own perfection in glory, better than this burden of flesh, and this howling wilderness? How odious is that darkness and unbelief, that unholiness and disaffection, that deadness and stupidity, which makes such love seem hard and unsuitable. Is it unsuitable or hard for the eye to see the light or the beauties of creation, or for a man to love his life or health, his father or his friend? What should be easier to a nature that has rational love, than to love Him who is love itself? He that loves all, and gives to all a capacity to love, should be loved by all; and He that has especially loved me, should especially be loved by me.

Love desires to please God, and therefore it desires to be in the most pleasing state, and freed from all that is displeasing to him; this is not to be hoped for on earth. Love desires all suitable nearness, acquaintance, union, and communion. It is weary of distance and alienation. It takes advantage of every notice of God to renew and exercise these desires. Every message and mercy from God is fuel for love; and while we are short of perfection, it stirs up our desires for more of God. The *soul* is where it lives.<sup>7</sup> If our friends dwell in our hearts by love, and if fleshly pleasures, riches, and honor dwell in the hearts of the voluptuous, covetous, and

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<sup>7</sup> Originally, “The soul is where it loves,” which is problematic. – WHG

proud, then surely God and Christ, heaven and holiness, dwell in the heart which loves them fervently. And if heaven dwells in my heart, will I not desire to dwell in heaven? If divine love would more plentifully pour itself upon my heart, how easy it would be to leave this flesh and world. Death and the grave would be but a triumph for victorious love. It would be easier to die in peace and joy, than to rest at night after a fatiguing day, or to eat when I am hungry. A little love has made me willingly study, preach, write, and even suffer; and wouldn't more love make me willingly go to God? Will the imagining of house, gardens, walks, libraries, prospects, etc., allure the desires of deceived minds, and yet thoughts of heavenly mansions, converse, and joys, not more powerfully draw my desires? Can I love such a world as this, where tyranny sheds streams of blood and lays cities and countries desolate; where the wicked are exalted, the just and innocent reproached and oppressed, the gospel restrained, and idolatry and infidelity prevail? And will I not think more delightfully of "the inheritance of the saints in light," Col 1.12 and of the cordial love and joyful praises of the church triumphant? Shouldn't I love a lovely and loving world much better than a world where there is comparatively so little loveliness or love? All that is of God is good and lovely. But here His glory does not shine in felicitating splendor.

I am taught to look upward when I pray, "Our Father which art in heaven." God's works are amiable even in hell; and yet, though I would know them, I would not be *there*. And alas, how much of the works of man are here mixed with the works of God! Here is God's wisdom, but man's folly; God's government, but man's tyranny; God's love and mercy, but man's wrath and cruelty; much of God's beautiful order and harmony, but much of man's deformity and confusion. Here there is much truth and justice; but how it is *mixed*. Here there are wise, judicious teachers and companions, but how few comparatively. Here are worthy and religious families; but by the temptations of wealth and worldly interest, how full they are even of the sins "of Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness," if not also of unmercifulness to the poor. Eze 16.49 And how few pious families of the great, that do not quickly degenerate from their progenitors by error or sensuality. Here there are some who educate their children wisely in the fear of God, and accordingly have comfort in them; but how many there are who train them up to the service of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

How many will send their children to get sciences, trades, or to travel in foreign lands, before they were ever instructed at home against those temptations which they must encounter, and by which they are so often undone. How commonly, once they have neglected this great duty to their children, they plead a necessity to thrust them out, from some punctilio of honor, or conformity to the world, or to adorn them with some of the plumes of fashionable modes and ceremonies, which will never compensate for the loss of heavenly wisdom, mortification, and the love of God and man. It is like sending them to sea for some trifling reason, without pilot or anchor, thinking that God must save them from the waves. And when such children have forsaken God, and given themselves up to sensuality and profaneness, these parents wonder at the judgments of God; and with broken hearts they lament their own infelicity, instead of lamenting their own misconduct. Thus families, churches, and kingdoms run on to blindness, ungodliness, and confusion. Folly, sin, and misery, mistaking themselves for wit, honor, and prosperity, are the ordinary pursuits of mortals. Most of the world has become such a bedlam, that the bravest man is the one who can sin and be damned with reputation and renown, and successfully draw the greatest number with him to hell. This is the world which stands in competition for my love, with the spiritual, blessed world.

In this world I have had many of God's mercies and comforts; but their sweetness was their taste of divine love, and their tendency to heavenly perfection. What was the end and use of all the good that ever I saw, or that God ever did for my soul or body, but to teach me to love

him, and to desire to love him more? Wherever I go, and whichever way I look, I see vanity and vexation written upon all things in this world, so far as they stand in competition with God; and I see holiness to the Lord written upon everything, so far as it leads me to Him as my ultimate end. The emptiness, danger, and bitterness of the world, and the all-sufficiency, faithfulness, and goodness of God, have been the sum of all the experiences of all my life. And shall a worldly, backward heart overcome the teachings of nature, Scripture, the Spirit of grace, and all experience?

“O my God, love is your great and special gift. All good is from you. Come into this heart, for it cannot come up to you. Can the plants go up to the sun for life, or the eye for light? Dwell in me by the Spirit of love, and I shall dwell by love in you. I easily feel that through your grace I love your word, your image, your work; and O, how heartily I love to love you, and how I long to know and love you more. And if ‘all things are of you, and through you, and to you,’ <sup>Rom 11.36</sup> surely this love is eminently so. It means *you*, Lord. It looks to you; it serves you: it moves and seeks and sighs for you: in you it trusts; and the hope and peace and comfort which support me are in you. When I was a returning prodigal in rags, you saw me afar off, and met me with the caresses of your love. And shall I *doubt* whether the One who has better clothed me, and has dwelt within me, will entertain me in the world of love?”

The suitability of things below to my fleshly nature has detained my affections too much on earth; and shall not the suitability of things above to my spiritual nature, much more draw up my love to heaven? *There* is the God whom I have sought and served. He is also *here*, but veiled, and little known. *There* He shines to heavenly spirits in heavenly glory. *There* is the Saviour in whom I have believed. He also dwelt on earth, but clothed in such meanness, and humbled to such a life and death, as to be a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks. <sup>1Cor 1.23</sup> Now he shines and reigns in glory, above the malice and contempt of sinners. And I shall live there because he lives; and in his light I shall see light. I had some rays of heavenly light *here*, but under what eclipses, and even long winter nights! *There* I shall dwell in the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, where there is no night nor eclipse. There are heavenly hosts, in whose holy love and joyful praises I would gladly partake. I have had *here*, though unseen, some of their loving assistance; but *there* I shall be with them, of the same nature, and of the same triumphant church. Perfected souls are there: not striving, like the disciples, about who would be the greatest; not like Noah in the old world, or Lot in Sodom, or Abraham among idolaters; nor like those who “wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, hid in dens and caves of the earth;” <sup>Heb 11.37-38</sup> nor like Job on the dunghill, or Lazarus at the rich man’s gate; nor like we poor bewildered sinners, feeling evil and fearing more. Should I fear a darksome passage into a world of perfect light? Should I fear to go to love itself? O excellent grace of faith which foresees, and blessed word of faith which foreshows this world of love.

And can you doubt, O my soul, whether you are going to a God who loves you? If the Jews discerned the great love of Christ for Lazarus by his tears, can you not discern his love to you in his blood? It is not less precious because it was shed, not for you alone, but for many. May I not say, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me? <sup>Gal 2.20</sup> Indeed, it is not so much I that live, but Christ lives in me. And will he forsake the habitation which his love has chosen, and which he has so dearly bought? ‘What shall separate us from the love of God?’ <sup>Rom 8.39</sup> If life has not, death shall not do it. O my soul, if leaning on Christ’s breast at dinner was a token of his peculiar love for John, isn’t his dwelling in you by faith, and his living in you by his Spirit, a sure token of his love for *you*?



Didn't his darkly saying, "If I will that he tarries till I come, what is that to you?" <sup>Joh 21.22</sup> raise a report that the beloved disciple would not die? Why then shouldn't plain promises assure you that you shall live forever with Him who loves you? Don't be so unthankful, O my soul, as to doubt whether your heavenly Father and your Lord love you. Can you forget the sealed testimonies of it? Didn't I repeat so many recently, as to shame your doubt? A multitude of your friends have so entirely loved you, that you cannot doubt it; and did any of them testify of their love with the convincing evidence that God has done? Are *they* love itself? Is *their* love so full, so firm and unchangeable as his? I think heaven is the sweeter, because many of my old, lovely, affectionate, holy friends are there, and I am more willing by death to follow them. And shouldn't it be more pleasing to think that my God and Father, my Saviour and Comforter are there? Wasn't Lazarus in the bosom of God? Yet he is said to be in Abraham's bosom. That is, he is not there alone, but we are *all* to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God. I am often ready to entertain myself with naming those of my friends who are now with Christ. But in heaven they will love me better than they did on earth, and my love for them will be more pleasant. But all these sparks are little to the sun.

Every place I have lived in has its monuments of divine love. Every year and hour of my life has been a time of love. Every friend, neighbor, and even enemy, have been the messengers and instruments of love. Every state and change of my life, notwithstanding my sin, have opened to me the treasures and mysteries of love. And shall I doubt whether the same God loves me? Is he the God of the hills and not of the valleys? Did he love me in my youth and health, and will he not also love me in my age and pain and sickness? Did he love all the saints better in their life than at their death? My groans grieve my friends, but don't abate their love. God loved me when I was his *enemy*, to make me a *friend*. God will finish his own work. O the *multitude* of mercies to my soul and body, in peace and war, in youth and age, to myself and to my friends. Have I lived in the experience of the love of God to me, and shall I die doubting it? I am not much in doubt of the truth of my love to him. I love his word, works, and ways, and would gladly be nearer to him, and love him more, and loathe myself for loving him no better. Peter may more confidently say, "You know that I love you," than, "I know that you love me," because our knowledge of *God's great love* is less than his knowledge of *our little love*; and without the knowledge of our love to God, we can never be sure of his special love to us. I am not entirely a stranger to myself. I know for what I have lived and labored, and whom I have desired to please. The "God whose I am, and whom I serve," <sup>Act 27.23</sup> has loved me in my youth, and will love me in my aged weakness. My pains seem grievous, but love chooses them, uses them for my good, moderates them, and will shortly end them. "Why then should I doubt my Father's love? Shall pain or dying make me doubt? Did God never love any but Enoch and Elijah? And in what am I better than my fathers? O for a clearer, stronger faith. I think Daniel's title, "a man greatly beloved," <sup>Dan 10.11</sup> should be enough to make one joyfully love and trust God, both in life and death. And don't all the saints have that title in their degrees? What else signifies their mark, "Holiness to the Lord?" <sup>Exo 39.30</sup> It is but our separation to God as his peculiar, beloved people. And how are we separated except by mutual love? He that is not otherwise beloved than hypocrites and unbelievers, must have his portion with them; and the ungodly, unholy, and unregenerate shall not stand in judgment, nor see God, nor enter into his kingdom. Upright souls are to blame for their groundless doubts of God's love, not for their acknowledging it, rejoicing in it, or for being solicitous to make it sure. Love brought me into the world, and furnished me with a thousand mercies, and has provided for me, delivered and preserved me till now; and will it not entertain my separated soul? Is God like false or insufficient friends, who forsake us in adversity?

I confess, I have wronged love by sin; but all except Christ were sinners, whom love has *purified and received to glory*. “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ (*by grace we are saved*) and raised us up together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” <sup>Eph 2.4-6</sup> O that I could love much, who had been forgiven so much! Those who are glorified, praise “Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God.” <sup>Rev 1.6</sup> Our Father, who has loved us, has given us “everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.” <sup>2The 2.16</sup> I know no sin which I do not repent of with self-loathing, and I earnestly beg and labor that none of my sins may be unknown to me. O that God would bless my accusations, that I may not be unknown to myself, even though some think me much better than I am. “Who can understand his errors?” Lord, “cleanse me from secret faults; keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins.” <sup>Psa 19.12-13</sup> I have an Advocate with you, and your promise, that “if we confess our sins,” you will “forgive them.” <sup>1Joh 1.9</sup> Wherever I have erred, Lord, make it known to me, that my confession may prevent the sin of others; and where I have not erred, confirm and accept me in the right. Since an unworthy worm has had so many testimonies of your love, let me not, when you say “I have loved you,” unthankfully ask, “In what have you loved me?” Heaven is no more spangled with stars, than your word and works are spangled with the refulgent signatures of love. Your well-beloved Son, the Son of your love, undertakes the message and work of the greatest love, and was full of the spirit of love which he shed abroad in the hearts of your elect, so that the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Spirit may be their hope and life. By his works, sufferings, and gifts, as well as by his comfortable word, he said to his disciples, “As the Father loved me, so I have loved you; continue in my love.” <sup>Joh 15.9</sup> Lord, how shall we continue in it, if not by the thankful belief of your love and loveliness, desiring still to love you more, and in all things to know and do your will, which you know is my soul's desire?

Draw nearer, O my soul, to the Lord of love, and do not be seldom and slight in your contemplation of his love and loveliness. Dwell in the sunshine, and you will know that it is light and warm and comfortable. Distance and strangeness nurture your doubts. “Acquaint yourself with him, and be at peace.” <sup>Job 22.21</sup> Look up, often and earnestly look up after your ascended glorified Head. Think where and what he is, and what he is now doing for all his own and once abased. Suffering love is now triumphant, reigning, *glorified* love; therefore it is no less now than in all its tender expressions on earth. Had I done this more and better, and as I have persuaded others to do it, I would have lived in more convincing delights of God's love. That would have turned the fears of death into more joyful hopes, and more earnest “desires to be with Christ” — in the arms, in the world, in the life of love — as far better than to be here in a world of darkness, doubts, and fears. But O, my Father, you infinite Love, though my arguments are many and strong, my heart is bad, my strength is weakness, and I am insufficient to plead the cause of your love and loveliness to myself or others. O plead your own cause, and what heart can resist? Let it not be my word only, but Yours: that you love me, even *me*, a sinner. Say as Christ said to Lazarus, “Arise!” Tell me as you do, that the sun is warm, yes, as you did, that my parents and dearest friends loved me. Tell me, just as by the consciousness and works of life you tell me, *that you have given me life*; that while I can say, “You who know all things, know that I love you,” I may infer, “Therefore I know I am beloved by you.” Thus let me come to you in the confidence of Your love, and long to be nearer, in the clearer sight, the fuller sense, and more joyful exercise of love forever.

Father, into your hand I commend my spirit. Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. **AMEN.**